
LED
INTO LIGHT


TOTALLY
BLIND

LED INTO LIGHT

BY

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'I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that Light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done.'

CHAPTER I.

DWELLING IN DARKNESS.

'Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh.'



'OME, Chrissie, we must go home; little Nat is so tired, and I can't feel my hands in this biting wind. Give me Tony's string, and take the ha'pence, child. How much is it?'

'One, two, three, fourpence ha'penny, grandfather, and I have fivepence. Yes, I'm ready, and, oh, I am very cold too!'

So saying, the speaker, a frail, stunted-looking little girl, took some coppers from the hat of the old blind man at her side, and, after stowing them away with great care under some few remaining primroses in her basket, slipped her hand into his, and the three left their accus-

tomed post near one of the Hyde Park gates, and turned to seek the shelter of their home.

Nat, a pale little lad about seven years old, insisted on carrying his sister's basket, now, happily, nearly cleared of its fragrant load. Though spring was well advanced by almanac rules, it was far colder than it had been in the carly days of January, and the piercing east wind chilled one's blood and one's hopes together, coming, as it did, just when there was reason to expect pleasant genial spring days. The carly shrubs in the Park, which had been tempted into opening their flowcr-buds during a deceitful spell of mild weather, now looked as if they werc bitterly repenting such rashness, and devoutly wished the tender pctals safe under their little brown coats again. The very evergreens shivered in the wind, though they had bravely encountered a hard winter.

It was scarcely five o'clock, yct few people wcre out, and those who had venturcd for a drive in open carriages soon turned homeward, while thc riders in the Row could hardly hold thcir horses' rcins. A fine sleet bcgan to strike spitefully, like bits of glass, in people's faccs, and even thosc most comfortably clad, or who, muffled in fur, rolled by in luxurious carriages, had epithets at hand, not thc most civil, rcspccting our English climate.

The blind man and his grandchildren, however, patiently trudgcd home in silence, far too much inurcd to hardships to think of making any complaint of thc weather. The wide thoroughfarcs were soon exchanged for gloomy back

streets, and finally for Lamb Court, a locality which, though not nearly so bad as many in our great city, looked the reverse of inviting this wintry afternoon. The houses were old and dilapidated, the street ill-paved and full of pools of muddy water, and the rain found its way from off the roofs, if not by an orthodox, certainly by a direct route. What matter though it streamed heavily in its descent on the heads of the luckless passers-by! Here and there some ragged clothing, which, though it had possibly been washed, could scarcely have been described as clean, dangled from the upper windows. Water was a scarce luxury here, soap much scarcer, and, as a result, cleanliness was almost unknown.

Of the sanitary state of such dwellings inquire not. Why should you? Nobody cared, and nobody either knew or spoke about it. Sometimes, however, the fierce and awful voice of fever would speak in ringing tones in those homes of the rich, not so far off, into which it had stealthily crept from these haunts of poverty, startling the authorities into a tardy and often but superficial search after its cause.

But no fever raged now in Lamb Court, and no one paid any heed to its poor, and, 'of course,' disreputable inhabitants. Certainly most of the wretched dwellers therein richly deserved the ill name they all received as a class. Born to a life of poverty and ignorance, often bordering on starvation and heathenism, and frequently with a further inheritance of crime and disgrace, what

wonder that they failed not to furnish, year by year, a constant relay of thieves, vagabonds, and 'roughs,' which make up the 'dangerous class' of our London population? Drunkenness was at the root of most of the evil. It formed the earliest temptation, and soon the habitual sin, and thus a bar to all hope of happiness and prosperity.

Even here, however, all was not perfect darkness. Like stars in a midnight sky, there glittered now and then the light of heavenly truth, reflected in some human heart, and shedding its healing ray amid surrounding darkness. Rare, very rare, it is true, were such shining lights, but they were not unknown, and were all the more precious amid such scenes of sorrow, and pain, and sin.

Picking his way carefully along the broken pathway, Tony, a terrier more remarkable for certain canine virtues than for personal beauty, led the feeble steps of his sightless master in tolerable safety. With his tail between his legs, his little paws soaked with cold rain, his rough coat mud-bespattered and dripping, the faithful little creature hurried no faster towards his well-known shelter than his master could easi y follow, and his brown eyes were now and then turned wistfully backwards to watch the somewhat uncertain footsteps. Their safety was now his sole responsibility, as he pattered up the uneven and creaking staircase of one of the poorest lodging-houses in the squalid street, for Chrissie and Nat had tarried at the little corner shop, marketing.

The wearied old man, glad to reach even so poor a

shelter from the pitiless weather, sank down on a chair almost exhausted, anxiously awaiting the children's return to kindle a fire, while his little guide lay curled at his feet. The room was poor enough, it was true; still, though not exactly clean, it was much less dirty than its neighbours, and not altogether destitute of comfort. The worm-eaten boards and woodwork were blackened with age, but a little strip of faded carpet lay before the hearth, where there was quite enough fuel piled for a small fire. The inmates were very poor, but as yet they had not faced actual destitution. Unlike most of his neighbours, old Donald Cameron rarely, if ever, crossed the threshold of 'The Lamb,' so the profits of Chrissie's flower-basket, together with the charity which his affliction secured him, had hitherto kept the wolf from the door.

At Meg Scratton's tiny shop Chrissie was getting their supper. A hard-featured, loud-voiced woman was Meg, and perhaps her dealings with the roughest and lowest had helped to make her so, but she had always a kind word for little 'Chris.' The feeble light of a smoke-begrimed oil-lamp did little more than make darkness visible within, and a repulsive odour of herrings, tobacco smoke, and general 'stuffiness' regaled the customers.

'Two ounces of tea,' said Meg, 'a candle, and some bread and sugar? Yes, my dear, you shall have them directly. What!' this to a small lad, who at this juncture elbowed his way past Nat, and presented himself at the counter. 'What! Herrings? No, be off

with you! your mother owes me a shilling now, and I won't trust her with a penny more. Don't show your impudent face here again without the money, or it'll be the worse for you!'

The child, who looked scarcely seven years old, replied with such evil language to this harangue, that Meg seized him by the collar, and turned him, kicking and swearing, out of the shop, banging the door after him. She coolly returned to Chrissie, without making any remark, as though such behaviour on the part of her small customers was quite an every-day occurrence, as doubtless it was.

'And I'll have two pennyworth of dripping, Meg, please,' went on Chrissie, carefully reckoning the money in her hand.

'So you shall, my dear, off this freshest piece. Yes, that's right,' she added, as Chrissie counted out the coppers. 'No wood? Got some, have you? That's lucky. 'Tain't many folks here got three sticks in the house an hour before they want it, I'll be bound.'

Meg deftly packed Chrissie's purchases into the basket on Nat's arm. The bit of dripping looked suspiciously like *three* pennyworth, Chrissie thought. Meg had a human heart hidden away somewhere under that ragged dress.

'Come, Chrissie, be quick!' said Nat. 'Won't it be nice to see a fire?'

Manfully shouldering the basket, while Chrissie took

the few remaining flowers, he hurried, with his sister, through the pelting sleet, up to their little attic home. In a few minutes the old man was spreading his benumbed hands over a cheerful blaze, while his little grand-daughter prepared their evening meal. Tony stretched himself full length in the flickering firelight, and dropped his wet little head on the floor with a contented sigh.

'Have you many flowers left, Chrissie?' her grandfather inquired presently; 'they'll not be good for much to-morrow.'

'Only three bunches,' answered Nat, who, while his sister made the fire, had been carefully putting the flowers in water, in an old cracked jug. They did not seem at present much to appreciate the kind attention, but flopped dismally over the edge, and held out but slender prospect of their bruised and wilted petals recovering their beauty.

'Oh, never mind, Nat, about those!' said Chrissie; 'we'll do, and I've money for more. Come, ar'n't you hungry? Oh, and so wet, too!' she exclaimed, as he came to the table. 'You must do without your coat a little, for it to dry.'

Poor children! They had no other clothes to take the place of these wet ones, but they ate their supper with contented hearts, none too plentiful as it was, though just enough to satisfy the cravings of hunger. A crust remained for the morning, which was quite an

unusual event, for Meg Scratton had by no means over-rated the hand-to-mouth habits of her neighbours respecting fuel, and the same was true of food. Perhaps, among all the lodgers in the street, there would hardly remain enough to feed a kitten after the evening meal, and scarcely enough money for one breakfast!

The meal over, the candle was put out, and Chrissie and Nat crouched over the fire together, the old man being sound asleep.

'Sing to me, Chrissie,' coaxed Nat, slipping down on the floor, and laying his little brown curly head against his sister's knee. 'It's no use looking for my star to-night, there won't be any out, and I ain't sleepy yet; sing to me.'

'I don't feel like singing to-night, dear,' the little girl replied, her thin hands resting caressingly on her brother's neck, among the rough locks. 'My throat aches with calling "Primroses" all day, and I haven't breath to sing. Look here, Nat!' she went on, hesitatingly, as she unfolded a rusty piece of crape, and displayed a shining, but scanty lock of long brown hair. 'That's mother's hair, Nat, and it's all we've got to help us remember her, —yes, and father, too. Oh, I did think we'd have seen father again, before this!'

Nat raised himself, and gazed wonderingly at the relic of the mother whom he could not remember. 'How pretty!' he said, softly stroking the silky tress. 'We can't have mother again, you know, Chrissie, and,

perhaps, if father came back, he would take us away from grandfather. Why do you want him so *very* much?'

'Why, Nat,' replied his sister, 'the very last thing mother said to me was this,—"Take care of Nat, my little girl, and be sure you are good, very good, to your father when he comes back;" and I've tried to take care of you, Nat; but father hasn't come, all these long years, and grandfather says he never will. No, never,' she added, slowly and sadly; 'and I am not to think about him. But oh, I want to know where he is, and why he doesn't come! He was so good to us always—until'—and the child stopped, confused by the stedfast gaze of Nat's brown eyes into her own—'until—he went away,' she added softly, as she folded up the shabby bit of crape.

'Don't cry, Chrissie,' said Nat, as he saw in the fading firelight his sister's face look sadly troubled, and caught the glitter of a great tear-drop as it rolled down, and fell on her ragged frock. 'You've got me, Chrissie, and grandfather; and I love you ever so;' and he nestled down again with his face in her lap.

Chrissie was not given to bursts of grief and tears. She had learned, poor child, to keep her troubles, great and small, pretty much to herself; indeed, it was quite unusual for her to mention her parents at all, though her childish mind dwelt very much on their loss. Presently her little brother's measured and deep breathing betrayed that the warmth and comfort had lulled him into a

sweet, dreamless slumber, and Chrissie would have indulged in one of her favourite musing fits, had not her grandfather just then awoke and stirred.

'Nat,' he said; 'where's my Nat?' The blind man always loved to feel his little grandson, of whom he was passionately fond, within his reach.

'Nat's asleep, grandfather,' said Chrissie, under her breath, 'here, down on the floor; his head's on my knee.'

'Ah, well, let the lad rest, Chrissie,' he replied. 'Poor little Nat! he's had a hard, cold day of it. Pass me my pipe, lass. I feel a bit better now. I was nigh famished when we came in.'

Chrissie took the old man's pipe from the mantelpiece, filled, and gave it him. Tobacco she would always find, even if bread must run short. With grave, thoughtful eyes, Chrissie watched the smoke-wreaths curl upwards, and the old man's face settle into a look of placid enjoyment, and judged that now, if at any time, she might venture to ask for her absent father. An instinctive shrinking from the subject had possessed her, after having received such faint encouragement in response to the few inquiries she had made; but to-night an intense desire to find out all there was to know overcame all scruples, and opened her lips.

'Grandfather,' she began, 'Nat and I have been talking to-night of mother, and of what she said to me about being good to father when he comes back.' Her voice dropped, and the words came slowly; she paused. But

the blind man made no reply, only he took his pipe from his mouth, and his face changed. 'Nat doesn't remember them, of course,' she went on, 'but oh, I do, so well! and I want to know where father went, and why he *doesn't* come back to Nat and me. Will he *never* come?' She stopped again, and glanced searchingly at her grandfather's face.

'Chrissie,' he answered bitterly, 'I wish you, like Nat, could not remember your father. Don't trouble about him, lass. No, he will never come back again. He deserted your mother and his helpless children, all through that cursed drink, and he needn't show his face here again. I'll never forgive him, setting himself up for being better than other folks, and then behaving a sight worse. Where he is I haven't any idea, and don't want to know. A good lad, too,' added the old man more gently, as though speaking to himself. 'Poor Martin! a dark day 'twas when he went off. The light of my life he was once,—yes, the light of my life. I miss the sun, God knows, since my eyes were darkened, but 'twas a darker sunset when my boy left me. Chrissie,' he added, recollecting the child's presence, 'don't vex yourself about your father, lass; and mind, I've told you this much, but you're never to ask any more, or to mention your father's name at all. Forget him! I have,—almost.'

Chrissie made no reply beyond a scarcely audible assent to her grandfather's words, but a deep flush rose

to her brow, and spread itself over her face and neck, while her small frame quivered with the desperate effort she made to control the strong, conflicting feelings in her young heart. Wounded pride for her father's memory, disappointment, and just a shade of indignation at her grandfather's command, united to upset her calm demeanour, but they were vanquished. The blind man enjoyed his pipe in silence; the fire sank, crackled feebly, and finally went out; Tony whined, stretched, and curled himself up in his corner for the night; Nat slept on; but Chrissie gave no sign of the anxious pain that oppressed her. Old Donald guessed nothing, and thinking her question had been merely an idle inquiry, was glad he had silenced it, and that there would be no chance of renewing the subject, for he knew his grandchild would faithfully obey him.

But Chrissie lay down to sleep that night with a heavy heart. 'The light of his life,' she said to herself. 'Yes, that's what grandfather called my dear father; and the light went out, and now we don't know where father's gone, and it's all dark, like it is up in this dismal room when the sun doesn't shine, or the black fogs come for days together. Mother told me something about "the light of the world" once, but I can't remember,' mused the child, 'it is so long ago. I suppose she meant the sun, but we seldom see it here in this dingy, smoky court, and Nat has not even seen his star for more than a week.'

In the midst of such perplexed, wistful wonderings, Chrissie fell asleep. About midnight the fierce storm abated, and pale stars twinkled faintly between the scudding drifts of gloomy clouds, and peered down between the chimneys, on the faces of the sleeping children. Living as they did in almost heathen darkness, in the very heart of a gospel-lighted Christian land, were they beyond the reach of 'the light of life,' or would He who is the Bright and Morning Star leave one of His little ones to perish?



CHAPTER II.

A GLOOMY SUNSET.

'Leave me not in darkened hour
To withstand the tempter's power.'



IT was a sad story of which her grandfather had given Chrissie a glimpse. His only son, a fine strong young man, always able to earn good wages, though somewhat irregular in his application to work, had cheerfully maintained him for years, and been, indeed, as he expressed it, 'the light of his life.' A skilful workman, Martin made ample provision for the wants of those dependent upon him, and would, moreover, often extend a helping hand to a brother in need. Unlike most of his fellow-workmen, he was a regular attendant at public worship, and among the little Methodist community with which he had become united, Martin met and married Chrissie's

mother, a young woman of somewhat superior birth and education to himself,—advantages Martin was quite able to appreciate for his children's sake, as well as for his own. Moreover, Nellie's Christian character was one of singular beauty and simplicity.

For the first few years of their married life all went well. Martin, though his company was eagerly sought by all who knew him, on account of his genial good-humour, ready wit, and fine, powerful voice, had no taste for low or vicious companionship, and disdained to spend his evenings, like many of his fellows, drinking and gambling at 'The Pig and Whistle.' Martin was too proud of his high character and good name willingly to risk their loss, and that very pride was for a time an effectual safeguard. He had yet to learn, and at very bitter cost, his own weakness, and also that it is well for him 'that girdeth on his armour not to boast as he that putteth it off.' There were those among Martin's associates who, because their own characters were none of the best, felt a malicious spite against him, and indulged a wicked desire to see him 'brought down a bit.'

Martin had always 'taken his glass like a man,' and had looked with something almost akin to contempt upon the staunch little band of abstainers in the village, with whom he often came in contact. Though seldom found in the public-house, he would drink readily enough, though never to excess, with his comrades, or when at work. Here, therefore, was a weak point, and here his

foes resolved to make the attaek. Skilfully and insidiously was he tempted, and fell, while his enemies took a fiendish delight in watching him stagger home quite intoxicated, to the astonishment and agony of his trustful young wife. But those tempters little guessed the far-reaehing, direful eonsequences of their shameful deed. Martin's proud spirit recoiled from any open confession of his fault, or from a penitent and patient recovery from sin and wilful self-confidence. Like Peter, he had sinned; like Peter, he saw the shame and disgrace of his sin: well had it been for Martin, if, like Peter, he had 'wept bitterly' the tears of genuine, humble repentance. Not so. Ashamed to face any one, in an hour of cowardly recklessness he left home and father, wife and children, and, taking his passage in an American steamer, quitted the eountry. He had not been on the oeean a day before he repented the folly and cruelty of his rash aet, but before opportunity for return offered itself, his pride rose in arms again, and forbade such humiliation. As weeks and months slipped by, each made a return seem more impossible, and in a far-off land he lived for years a wandering, desolate, miserable life.

From the hour of her husband's eruel desertion, Nellie Cameron drooped and sickened, and her health, never of the strongest, failed visibly, though she strove bravely to bear up to the last for her ehildren's sake. But Martin, whom she loved devotedly, had given his wife her death-

blow, and before a year had passed away, Donald laid his daughter-in-law in her early grave, and Chrissie and Nat were orphans. Blindness overtook the broken-hearted old man shortly after, and, leaving their home in weary despair, he came to hide his bitter sorrow and to gain a scanty and precarious livelihood in the great city.

Alas! the physical darkness which was now his lot was but a type of the shadow of death in which his soul dwelt. He found an excuse in his son's conduct for including all religion as 'sham' and 'cant;' would never enter any place of worship, indeed, he had rarely done so before; and on no account would he permit the city missionary or minister to cross his threshold, or allow Chrissie and Nat to go to a Sunday school; not that they had much inclination to do so, poor children. Their grandfather was neither able nor willing to give them any instruction.

Chrissie was an intelligent, thoughtful child, and she would strive earnestly, sometimes, to remember the little her mother had taught her in very early years. But all was dim and shadowy, and her efforts were in vain. She would try to spell out her grandfather's placard which he wore on his neck, having picked up two or three letters, and would show the two T's to Nat, and the O and I; but that the whole read 'Totally blind' she had not learned by any ability to read the words. Chrissie was now the bread-winner, and her grandfather leaned and depended on the feeble child.

Dearly he loved them both, Nat with the most passionate devotion, the little fellow seeming to have secured the place in his heart which had once so warmly cherished his absent son. And Nat abundantly returned the love of his grandfather and sister, and would stoutly and gallantly defend the rights of the latter. Indeed, it was often comical to see him place his small, insignificant self between Chrissie and any insolent boy, though twice his own size, who dared to interfere with his sister. Fortunately for him, most of the lads in the court looked upon Nat with cool, half-amused contempt, and seldom molested either of the children. Nat was the happiest of the little circle, for he had no sad recollections of the past, and no anxieties for the supply of daily wants, which burden rested so heavily on the young heart and hands of his sister. To him was owing all the brightness that ever visited the forlorn little home or gilded the lives of old Donald and Chrissie.

CHAPTER III.

RESISTING THE LIGHT.

'Behold a Stranger at the door,
He gently knocks—has knocked before;
Has waited long, is waiting still:
You use no other friend so ill.'



OME brighter and more genial weather succeeded the unseasonable and bitter storm which had made such sad havoc among the early spring blossoms, but Donald was unable for some weeks to take his accustomed place at the Park gates with his little grandchildren. The feeble old man had taken a severe cold during his wet and weary walk, and it had brought on such a terrible cough, and rendered him so weak, that he could scarcely totter across the room, and the scanty supply of coarse food which they were able to get did not help much in hastening his return to health.

Some days were now so bright that the sunlight actually penetrated the murky atmosphere of the dingy court, and streamed, warm and cheering, into the bare little room. Then the blind man loved to have his chair moved near to the little window in the roof, and to sit so that the sweet, welcome sunbeams fell on his closed, sightless eyes. He could discern a little light then, though unable to distinguish objects, and he loved, above all things, to feel the warm rays of the great light-giver on his face and hands, while he was still unable to get out into the air and sunlight. Such days were golden ones to Donald. He was alone most of the time, for Chrissie and Nat were out as usual with the flowers; rent must be paid, and food and fuel, however scanty, provided. Though the pence their grandfather daily received when he was with them were sorely missed, the children managed to secure enough for their needs, for London was full now, and the warm days had brought out the sweet spring flowers by myriads in the far-away country lanes and meadows, and they came up to the markets in such abundance that Chrissie's basket was always well filled with most of the flowers in season.

One evening they were returning home in the early dusk. Chrissie was climbing the steep stair somewhat languidly, with Tony, hungry and tired, patiently trotting up just in front of her, and Nat lingering some distance behind, when Tim, one of the roughest and most blustering boys in the court, who lodged in the same house,

came clattering down the stairs, and met the little girl with her basket just at the ill-lighted, crooked turn in the dirty staircase. Poor Tony was unlucky enough to get in Tim's way, and the rough, brutal lad sent him flying with a savage kick down to the landing below.

'Oh, Tim, how could you? How cruel!' cried Chrissie in distress; but the next moment she shrank back terrified, as the angry, cowardly boy turned fiercely upon her. In another minute the little girl would have received a heavy blow from the boy's uplifted arm, had not little Nat come bounding up the stairs, and, with all his small strength, flung himself upon the big, rough fellow who had dared to strike his sister, and to ill-use his dear Tony. Tim, however, quickly shook Nat off, but, luckily, was in far too much of a hurry to stop and fight.

'Take that for your interference!' he exclaimed, as he aimed a careless blow at the little boy. But Nat cleverly evaded it, and Tim dashed on down the staircase, and ran, shouting and jeering, to join a group of ragged young desperadoes in the court below.

'Oh, Tony! my poor, dear Tony!' said Nat tenderly, as he picked up the dog, and carried him up-stairs. 'Chrissie, he's so hurt,' he went on, beginning to cry. 'Cruel, wicked, hateful Tim! Look at the cut on Tony's head; and I do believe one of his legs is broken, he can't stand on it a bit. Oh, what *shall* we do?'

The children were ascending the stairs close to their

own door, when, just then, the opposite one opened, and a young man came out. He was the city missionary, who sometimes reached even this neglected, dark region, and he had just been visiting a sick woman. He had heard the scuffle on the stairs, but similar sounds were of such frequent occurrence among the haunts he visited, that the voices had scarcely attracted his notice. But now, as he met the children, he saw they were in trouble, and stopped to ask what was the matter.

Chrissie explained, while Nat added more particulars about the wounded dog between his sobs. As the young man listened, his face flushed with indignant anger at the cruel, dastardly act, and he said:

'Where do you live, children? May I come in with you, and see what can be done for your dog?'

'Oh yes! please, sir, come in; we live here,' replied Chrissie gladly, opening the door, and inviting the stranger to enter. 'Grandfather,' she said, 'that cruel Tim has kicked poor Tony down-stairs, and nearly knocked both of us down, too, and this gentleman says he will do something for Tony if he may come in;' and she glanced a little doubtfully at the blind man's face.

'Who is it?' said Donald, turning toward the voice, and evidently haunted with some suspicion that the term 'gentleman' might possibly apply to a 'parson' of some persuasion.

The young man, however, was 'wiser in his generation' than some of 'the children of light,' and was in no haste

to make known his profession. 'I am very fond of dogs,' he said, 'and I am afraid that yours is a good deal hurt. Ah, my friend,' he added kindly, 'I see you are blind, and I suppose it is Tony's duty to guide you when out alone.'

'Yes, sir,' returned Donald, 'it is; and we all love Tony. Chrissie! Nat is not hurt, is he?' the old man added suddenly, in an anxious tone, as he caught the sound of the boy's sobs.

'Oh no, grandfather,' said Chrissie, 'not one bit! he's only crying about Tony.'

'Come! let us see what I can do for him,' said the missionary, taking the little creature from the child's eager clasp.

It cried piteously as it was moved. On examination, the cut proved to be only slight, but the poor little leg was broken. However, Tony's kind doctor did not grudge a little trouble to relieve the suffering dog, so, taking a scrap of firewood, which Chrissie brought, he soon made some splints, and then ruthlessly tore a strip from his handkerchief, and bound up the injured leg in its right position. Tony whined and licked his hand as he did so, and seemed grateful and contented when the operation was over. While thus occupied, Mr. Grey, the missionary, made a few kindly inquiries of the old man about his health, and his two grandchildren, and, as he left, he said:

'I hope, my friend, that though your eyes are closed

to earthly light, you know something of Christ, "the Light of the world." We all "walk in darkness" apart from Him.'

The old man's brow clouded; he had chatted much more freely than was usual for him with a stranger, for his interest had been aroused on hearing of the rough treatment of his grandchildren and the injured dog, but now his suspicions returned, and, without offering any reply to Mr. Grey's words, he asked shortly, 'Are you the parson?'

His visitor smiled, and said pleasantly, 'No, certainly I am not "the parson." I go about on similar work, it is true, but—'

'Oh, well, it's all the same!' said Donald, interrupting him; 'I'm very much obliged to you, sir, for the trouble you've taken over my poor dog, and for speaking so kind-like to little Chrissie and Nat, but I don't want no religion here. You may be very good, but most o' them religious folks are a parcel o hypocrites. Yes, I know all about it,' he went on, as Mr. Grey tried to put in a few words. 'You can't tell me nothink that I haven't heard scores o' times, and I tell you it's all cant and rubbish, and I won't have it here.'

His visitor's face fell; he saw the old man was becoming excited, and that any continuance of the subject would only anger him still more, so, after a kind farewell, he was obliged, reluctantly, to leave, without speaking of the gospel message which it was his daily joy to

carry among the degraded and ignorant dwellers in such abodes, alike shut out from the bright sunlight and the spiritual light of life.

As he went out, however, he gave to the little girl a pretty pictured children's tract. Chrissie took it gladly, though she did not tell the giver how unable she was to read it, lest he might withdraw the gift. On the cover her eyes rested on a beautiful figure, clothed in a long white garment, and gently knocking, with uplifted hand, at a fast-closed door. In the other hand, by a golden chain, he carried a shining lamp, from which the warm light streamed out into the surrounding darkness. The feet were bare, and the head thorn-crowned, while from the latter there shone out a soft, strange light, and the gentle, searching eyes seemed to look into her very soul. Chrissie and Nat gazed at the picture wonderingly. They could not in the least understand the strange figure, neither were they able to read a word about it within the leaves, or even to make out the text beneath, 'I am the Light of the world.' Yet they were very pleased with it; 'and some day,' said Chrissie, 'when I'm grown up, perhaps, I'll learn to read, Nat, and then I'll tell you all about it.' And with that vague hope they had to be content.

Tony's leg had been so well doctored, and his cut healed up so quickly, that he was soon pronounced 'convalescent,' and hopped about the room on three legs. It is true, he protested somewhat against the splint on

his leg, but, by dint of coaxing and threatening, Chrissie prevented him from tearing it off, and the broken bone gradually re-united. But the blind man's cough continued very bad, so that he was quite unable to go out, and the little dog's services were not needed again for some weeks. So the two invalids stayed at home and kept each other company through the long days, while Chrissie and Nat were away at the Park gates.

CHAPTER IV.

'MY STAR, MY SUN.'

'Light of the lonely pilgrim's heart,
Star of the coming day,
Arise, and with Thy morning beams
Chase all our griefs away.'



A FEW days after the encounter with Tim, Chrissie, having returned home one evening a little earlier than usual, wandered out alone into the dingy street from which Lamb Court opened. The evenings were warm and pleasant, and, though wearied with standing and walking most of the day, the child did not turn homewards after leaving the little shop at the corner of the court. She had been in, not for any needed purchases, but to ask for Meg, who had been ill, and missing from her post behind the counter for several days. Chrissie was grateful for the

kindly feeling shown towards her by the rough, uncouth woman, and felt really concerned that she should be suffering.

'Mother is awful bad!' Chrissie was informed by a small, animated heap of rags, who was doing duty in Meg's place. This remark was not very satisfactory or very lucid, but Chrissie only received a series of nods and shakes from the shock of matted black hair that surmounted the heap of rags, in reply to any further questions she proposed. She had, therefore, to be satisfied, and hope that 'mother' would soon be well enough to appear and speak for herself.

Chrissie turned aimlessly into the busy street, loitering by the few tawdry shops as she passed. The little girl felt weary and dejected. Her grandfather, though regaining strength, had not yet been able to join her and Nat, and contribute to the daily very slender earnings. Warmth and light were to be had for nothing now, or the children would have been sorely pinched. Chrissie brooded anxiously, and almost despairingly, over the thought of her absent father, though she kept her feelings all fast locked up in her little sorrowful heart. And now Meg was ill. Coarse and rough as she was, Chrissie missed her kind words, though they were very few, and not of the tenderest description. She had rather hoped, also, to have seen her friend Mr. Grey again, who had given her the little book, but he had not come. The book she had treasured carefully, on account of the

picture, but the gospel message it contained lay beyond her reach.

Suddenly, as she strolled listlessly along, the sound of singing fell on the child's ear. A sweet and simple air it was, led by a well-sustained woman's voice, while others, in various degrees of harmony and discord, made up the united effect. Chrissie had all her father's love and appreciation of music, and a correct ear, and her voice was sweet and rich, though not powerful. Nat loved to hear her sing; but the only words the little girl knew were those she had picked up by overhearing scraps and choruses of a few senseless songs. Almost as the sounds first reached her ear, they ceased; but she paused, and listened intently. Again they began, and rose and fell as before. Chrissie, almost unconsciously, drew nearer to the sound, which came from the half-open door of a little shop, which was doing duty as a temporary mission-room. Attracted by the music, she crept noiselessly into the little entry, and listened, entirely concealed from those within. It was a mothers' meeting, and the women were singing their closing hymn. Till now Chrissie had caught none of the words, for she was quite unfamiliar with any like these. The child wondered as they fell on her ear,—

'I found
In Him my Star, my Sun,
And in that Light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done.'

'"My star,"—was that the star that Nat loved so

much to watch? "My sun." Yes,' she said to herself, 'the sun is the best of all, when it will only shine right through the murky smoke. How grandfather likes it on his closed eyelids! "The light of life,"—where have I heard those words?' Chrissie questioned. '"Star," and "sun," and "light of life." What do the singers mean? and where have they found them all three?'

She was so lost in perplexed wondering that she did not stir as the voices dropped and ceased. A little toddling child ran across the room after a fugitive reel of cotton, which rolled almost to Chrissie's feet. As his mother followed and picked him up, she caught sight of the little girl, and beckoned her in. Chrissie shrank back; but the young mother took her hand, and led her to a seat at her side, while the Scriptures were read at the close of the meeting. The little girl listened in astonishment; but she neither understood nor remembered anything. But the words of the hymn still sounded in her ears, and had taken a deep, fast hold on her mind, and it was on these that her thoughts ran, though the more she pondered the more puzzled she became.

The woman who had captured and brought her in was not quite unknown to Chrissie. She went by the name of Nell, and lodged in the room next the Camerons', from which Chrissie had seen the missionary come out after his visit to the sick woman. Nell had often noticed with interest the grave, gentle child with

her flower-basket, and sometimes had seen the old man and Nat; but her only advances had been so coldly received by their grandfather that she had never been able to gain any knowledge of the children. Nell rightly guessed that their birth was not so low and degraded as their surroundings, and pitied their forlorn and destitute condition. Now that she had, in this unexpected way, gained access to Chrissie, she determined to take the opportunity of securing the little girl's confidence, and discovering something of her history.

When the meeting was over, therefore, she took the child's hand in one of hers, and, with her baby on the other arm, left the room at once, lest her new acquaintance should be scared away by the curious prying eyes of the rest of the mothers in the little gathering. Chrissie carried her small bundle of work, and seemed quite content to go with her, responding readily enough to Nell's kindly inquiries for her grandfather and Nat; for the child quickly discerned the friendly feelings manifested toward her. But she drew back almost into silence when her companion questioned her about her early days. Chrissie did not care to talk to any one of her parents, or of her life before she came to Lamb Court, partly because she neither knew nor remembered much of either, and partly from a reluctance to reveal anything disgraceful to her father's memory. So Nell had to be content with little more than 'Yes' and 'No' in reply to her questions on these topics, though Chrissie chatted

freely of her flower-selling and her home life, and gave a full account of poor Tony's misfortune, down to the gift of the lovely picture, which she could not understand.

'Come in, little one,' said Nell, as they reached the landing. 'Come in and see mother; she can never get out, or even off her bed, and she'd like to see the little gell I've so often telled her about.'

Chrissie looked a little doubtful at first whether she might accept this invitation without her grandfather's leave, but she followed Nell into the room. In the opposite corner, in a bed under the window, lay an old woman, perhaps about seventy years of age, and evidently a helpless cripple. Her head was raised with pillows, and her thin hands lay outside the dingy coverlet. All her surroundings were of the poorest and most meagre description; but on her wrinkled face rested such a happy look of calm, even cheerful content, that Chrissie gazed at her as at a beautiful picture, as if fascinated by some subtle charm. Such evil faces thronged the child's daily life, faces bearing deep marks of hopeless sin and sorrow; but here was one that seemed to shine with some mysterious glory. Chrissie had yet to learn that many faces, like Moses', have caught and reflect around them divine light after close communion with the great Light-giver.

No one else was in the room. It had hardly any furniture; but a Punch and Judy show standing against the opposite wall suggested at least one other inmate,

and took up a large portion of the space at the disposal of the family. Toby, partly in professional attire, sat gravely contemplating the small fire, by which a little black kettle sang feebly and spasmodically.

'Come here, my dear,' said the old woman, stretching out one hand, as far as she was able to move it, toward Chrissie. 'So you are the little girl who lives in the next room? My Nell tells me of you sometimes.'

'I picked her up at the meeting, mother, this afternoon,' put in Nell; 'she crept near to hear the singing, so I coaxed her in, and we came home together.'

'So you love singing, little one, do you?' went on the crippled woman, as Chrissie rather shyly approached her; 'and what was it you heard this afternoon?'

'Only a very little,' replied the child timidly, 'and I didn't understand it at all; please, I never heard anything at all like it before.'

'We sang "I heard the voice of Jesus say" this afternoon,' explained Nell. 'I don't know how much she heard.'

'Oh, not that,' said Chrissie, 'nothing like that; it was something about a "star" and a "sun," but I can't remember all; and, please,' she added, 'I mustn't stay now; grandfather will wonder where I am.'

'Well, you will come and see me again, little Chrissie?' said the old woman, 'and I will tell you what those words mean. Stop, don't you know *anything* of the "voice of Jesus"?'

'No,' returned the child innocently; 'I never heard of Him. Does He talk to you?'

A shade of pain passed over the old woman's face at these words, and Chrissie wondered whether her crumpled, helpless hands hurt her much. She hesitated a moment at the child's simple question, and then said, 'Yes, dear, He does. Come as soon as ever you can, and I'll tell you about Him.'

Chrissie promised, slipped out, and darted off across the landing to her own home.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST STREAK OF DAWN.

'A heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathize.'



HRISSIE was unable to pay her promised visit to the crippled woman so soon as she had intended. It was her most prosperous season, for the spring flowers in her basket had all given place to a more varied and brilliant display of summer ones. The London season had reached and passed its height, and while there still remained ready purchasers, no chance must be lost. Old Donald, too, had somewhat recovered his strength, and his cough was almost gone, so that he was able to join his grandchildren once more, and attract attention, sympathy, and coins by his sad affliction and venerable appearance.

Nell caught Chrissie once or twice, and told her that her mother was looking anxiously for another visit; but

the days were now so long that the little party did not return home till late, and Chrissie shrank from facing the proprietor of the Punch and Judy show, who might be at home after dusk. Meanwhile, however, the little girl had forgotten nothing of the words she had overheard. She often talked about them to Nat, and was none the less anxious to find out their meaning.

At last an opportunity for the visit occurred. It was a drenching summer day, not stormy, but just a steady, straight downpour, the clouds 'dropping fatness' on meadows and corn in the far-away country, and, though neither pleasant nor exactly life-giving in town, the heavy rain washed the hot, dusty roads, and swept a purifying flood through close, ill-smelling alleys and stuffy back streets.

As they had enough money for present needs, Donald decided not to venture out, their chances of gain being very small; so, after running round to inquire for Meg, who had not yet reappeared behind the counter of her little shop, Chrissie took her picture and a few of her best flowers, and presented herself at Nell's door.

'Oh, here's Chrissie come at last, mother,' said Nell, as she saw the child. 'Come in, dear. I'm just going out, so you'll keep mother company; she's often alone for hours together.'

The old woman looked whiter and more pinched than before, Chrissie thought, as she took the little stool Nell gave her close to the bedside; but the same radiant



happiness lit up her wrinkled face when she clasped the little girl's small, shapely hand in one of her own, all crumpled and deformed by disease.

'This is one of my better days, little one,' she said, 'and I'm so glad to see you. I've been looking out for you ever since you came in with Nell that afternoon. And are these for me, dear?' she added, as Chrissie timidly laid her little offering of flowers on the bed.

'Please, I thought maybe you'd like a few,' said the child shyly. 'I'd have come before, but I've been out every day since I was here.'

The crippled woman smiled with eager pleasure as she lifted the flowers, and gazed at their sweet, fresh beauty. They were but a few common rosebuds, and some sprigs of mignonette, but how refreshing were their graceful forms and sweet scent to the invalid, and how they carried her mind back to her childhood's country home, and wakened the voices of the dead in her ears once more.

'What a kind little girl to bring me these,' she said, with the tears in her eyes. 'They'll not wither before Nell comes in, so I'll keep their pretty faces close by me a bit. Does Chrissie know who made the flowers?' she went on, turning herself with difficulty on her pillows, that she might see the child's face better.

'No,' said Chrissie, 'I'm sure I don't; they grow, don't they? Nobody makes them. I suppose the gardeners take care of them; I see them putting in the plants in the Park sometimes.'

'Do you know *nothing* about God, Chrissie?' the old woman asked searchingly. 'Can't you read? And haven't you heard the name of Jesus?'

Chrissie hesitated a moment, and then said:

'I think I've heard mother tell something about Him, but, oh! it's so long, long ago, and I can't remember it clearly, Mrs.—please, I don't know what your name is,' she said. 'What shall I call you?' and she stopped abruptly.

'Call me Granny, dear,' was the reply. 'Everybody here calls me Granny now.'

'Well, please, then, Granny,' Chrissie went on, 'I was such a very little girl when mother died, that I can hardly remember anything about her, though I try very hard sometimes,—except one thing,' she added slowly and half reluctantly.

'What is that, my dear?' inquired Granny.

'Not about God at all, but just this,' the child replied: '"Be good, very good to your father when he comes back;" and he has never come back, never; and grandfather says he never will now.'

She stopped. The kindly sympathizing glance of the old woman rested on her, and as the tender words 'Poor child!' escaped her lips, the reserved, self-contained Chrissie actually dropped her head on the bed, and broke into a passionate fit of weeping. The child had been completely surprised into this unwonted show of feeling. The genuine sympathy of the crippled woman had gone

straight to the little troubled heart, had touched its hidden springs of grief, and the long pent-up, forbidden tears leapt forth ere she could control herself. For a few minutes the slight, delicate frame quivered under the outburst of sorrow, though the sobs came only deep and low. Granny did not speak one word, only she laid her distorted fingers on the little fair head, and smoothed the silky hair gently with her soft touch. Presently Chrissie raised her head.

'Please, I'm very sorry,' she said, still drawing deep sobs between her words; 'but it was speaking of father, and—'

'Never mind,' said Granny soothingly. 'Now you just put your head down again, my dear, while I talk to you, and lie quite still.'

The delicate feeling of the old woman discerned at once that the child would recover herself far better and be more at ease in that position, so long as her little pale face bore such visible traces of recent tears.

'You know,' she began, as Chrissie's face nestled down close to her hand, 'I promised to tell you what those words meant which puzzled you so much, "I found in Him my star, my sun.' But first you shall hear all the verse:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's Light:
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.'

I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun,
And in that Light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done."

Now, dear, the great God, up in heaven, made this world and everything in it, and, far away up there, the sun, and moon, and stars. But He made us the highest and nearest Himself, Chrissie, because we have souls, and will live somewhere else after our bodies die. Now this great Maker of all calls Himself our Father, dear, and a father loves to have his children live with him, and love him, as you love your dear father, whom you can only just remember. But this great Father is quite holy, and we, Chrissie, are sinful, and not fit to live with Him.'

'Yes, I know that,' responded Chrissie; 'I know I'm often not at all a good girl, though grandfather never scolds me. I feel it somehow, and it makes me uncomfortable, though I didn't know it mattered much.'

'It matters this, dear,' went on Granny: 'we can never live with our Father in heaven, but must go away from Him into darkness, unless we are quite perfect and pure like He is.'

'Then I don't see how that will ever be,' returned Chrissie sadly.

'And we have broken His holy law, Chrissie, and that is sin, and He says that "the soul that sinneth it shall die." God cannot overlook sin, dear, or ever have those to dwell with Him who are unholy.'

'It is all dark, then,' said the child despairingly,—'all quite dark; just sinning and being punished.'

'Exactly,' said Granny; 'all quite dark like midnight. But how is it, dear, that it is not all quite dark in this room now as it was at twelve o'clock last night?'

'Why, the sun has risen,' said Chrissie, 'and though it does not shine brightly to-day, there is light.'

'Yes, dear, and God has not left us in darkness. He loved us so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, for us; and Jesus came and bore our punishment that we might have pardon. He died that we might live, and so He is called the Sun of Righteousness, for He has chased away the dark night of guilt and death, and given us, instead, the bright shining of forgiveness, and joy, and holiness. We have only to look at this Light of the world, just as you look, dear, at the welcome, beautiful sunlight in the morning.'

Chrissie had lifted her head as her friend had been speaking, and was gazing fixedly and earnestly into the old woman's face. As she paused, the child said simply:

'And can *I* have the light, Granny? Is it for *me?* Will Jesus take away my sin, and be my Star, my Sun?'

'Yes, Chrissie, just as the sunlight is free to all who will enjoy it, and the Lord only asks your love, dear, in return for His.'

'Oh, Granny, how beautiful!' returned Chrissie, watching through the window a little break in the

clouds, between which the sunbeams were casting a gleam of light; 'I do love Him for that.'

Over the pale face of the child shone a new light, even a divine gladness and joy. She dropped her head into its former position, and was silent. Granny's eyes rested lovingly on the bowed head, then her eyelids closed, but she wasn't asleep. Presently Chrissie looked up again, and, taking out her dear little book with the wonderful picture, at which Nat and she had so often gazed in such perplexity, she laid it on the bed, saying:

'Granny, the missionary gave me this, and I brought it to ask you what the picture means, but I think you have told me already. Isn't that Jesus?'

'Yes, dear,' said Granny; 'it does not mean that He really carries a beautiful lamp, but that He is Himself the Light of the world. You see He is knocking at that poor hut, to ask that the door may be opened for the glorious light to stream in. He is knocking, dear, at your heart now, and wants to light up all its darkness with His bright beams. Ask Him to shine there, Chrissie.'

'But, Granny, I don't know what to say,' replied the child. 'May I really speak to Him myself?'

'He is close by you always, dear, and ready to listen,' said Granny. 'Will you try and remember this little prayer, and say it every day? "Lord Jesus, come, shine into my heart, take away all the sin and darkness there, and fill me with Thy light. Amen."'

'Oh yes, I can always remember that!' said Chrissie. 'And is it because Jesus has given you His light,' she went on hesitatingly, 'that you look so happy, Granny?'

'Doesn't the sunlight make you feel glad, Chrissie?' returned the old woman; 'and, my dear, those who walk in "the light of the Lord" can never be gloomy or dull.'

Chrissie was silent.

'How wonderful!' she said presently.

'You will find it is quite true, dear,' went on the crippled woman; 'there's plenty of gladness and joy in Jesus for us, if we will only let it come into our hearts and lives. When He went back to heaven, He told those who loved Him that His joy should remain with them, and that it should be full. Jesus had grief and trouble to bear, dear, very much, more than we can understand, but it was *joy* He promised to His people.'

And then Granny opened her Testament, and read a little to Chrissie of the Saviour's life and death, and when Nell came in, she thought—but it might have been only fancy—that the child's thin face had caught something of the crippled woman's sunny brightness. Chrissie kissed her friend, and, slipping out of the room, glided away to her grandfather and Nat.

The morn had broken on her path. Her feet were in the golden light of the dawning. No difficulties about her own faith or feelings, no uncertainties of the merits of that One Sacrifice, no doubts of her acceptance

by her Lord, had troubled the young heart. 'The voice of Jesus' had spoken. The simple, ignorant child had heard, and looked to Him. She had found the Star,—the Sun which knows no setting,—and, following Him, she would never more 'walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'



CHAPTER VI.

DARK DAYS.

Art thou weary? Art thou languid?
Art thou sore distrest?
"Come to Me," saith One, "and coming,
Be at rest."'



CHRISSIE'S mind was very full of the wonderful things she had learned of her old neighbour, and she told her grandfather what a kind old woman Granny was, and how, though she lay there on her back day after day, yet she always looked so happy and bright. The old man listened in silence, till the child repeated some of the lines of the hymn and the gospel story which she had heard; then his brow darkened, and he stopped her abruptly.

'Chrissie, child,' he said, 'I won't have this; you're a good little girl, and I won't have you spoiled. No one shall talk religion to you, so, mind, I won't have you go in there any more to be preached to.'

He did not speak unkindly, nor did he, perhaps, guess half the pain which his words gave to the child. 'Nell's been very kind to you,' he went on, 'and you may talk to her when you see her, but I ain't going to have you preached to by Granny.'

'Who's Granny?' said Nat drowsily, raising himself in his grandfather's arms, where he had been lying asleep; 'and where have you been all this time, Chrissie?'

'Never you mind, Nat,' said his grandfather; 'Chrissie is getting us some tea;—and isn't the rain over, my boy? I can't hear it on the roof now.'

'Oh yes, grandfather, and the sunshine is sparkling on the wet roofs and on the windows so brightly!'

Chrissie thought, as her brother spoke, of the Sun of whom she and Granny had been talking, and though her grandfather would not listen to anything on the subject, she knew she would find a delighted hearer in Nat, especially if she could sing to him the verse she had learned. She was content to wait her time.

The disappointment in not being able to visit Granny again was very great, though Chrissie made no appeal against her grandfather's command. Indeed, she knew that it would be quite useless, and had no thought of disobeying him. The little girl had not guessed that the few lines from the hymn which she had repeated had struck home. They were old familiar words to the blind man, reminding of happier bygone days; but 'the voice of Jesus' to his heart had been unheeded and

unanswered. He had shut his eyes to the healing rays of the Sun of Righteousness, even as his natural ones were closed to the noonday sun; he had chosen and loved darkness rather than light, and now it seemed as if no voice could ever call him forth from the shadows of death in which he dwelt. The light had been shining in darkness, 'but the darkness comprehended it not.' Yet the child's words haunted him for days, and the warm summer sun, in the brightness of which he was able to discern a little light, only served to keep them in mind. He tried to forget them, and, after a time, their memory died away once more from the hardened conscience and stubborn heart.

Meanwhile, the dawning light of the gospel message was finding a ready welcome, and bringing its life and joy to the childish mind of his little grandson. Nat listened with eager interest to the oft-repeated story from his sister's lips, until it was deeply impressed on both the children's memories and hearts. Often, as they walked home together in the soft summer twilight, when the stars were just beginning to peep out, one by one, they would talk of the wonderful Friend who had come to die for them; and though they knew so little of Him, yet the light of that Day Star was welcomed and rejoiced in, and to those who 'hold fast' that which they 'have already,' is given the promise of 'the Morning Star.'

Granny waited and watched in vain for another visit from her little friend, and when Nell had met the child,

and learned the cause of her continued absence, the crippled woman despaired of seeing her again, and could only pray that the feeble light her words had kindled might shine more and more unto the perfect day, in spite of the darkness by which it was surrounded. Long hours Granny spent alone, while Nell was out at the factory, and Nell's husband catering for the public amusement, and picking up a scanty livelihood with his show. But she was never gloomy or dull, as she lay, helplessly bedridden, looking on the grimy chimney-pots and sooty roofs. She was rejoicing in the Lord always, and able to 'count it all joy' when encompassed by trial and privation. Some days were passed in extreme suffering, and, indeed, she was never quite free from pain, and her food was often scanty, and never suited to her weak and helpless condition. Granny could read, however, and this was a great solace in the lonely hours when she felt easy enough to give attention to her large-print Testament. Occasionally, too, the city missionary came in to see her, as on the day when he had met Chrissie and Nat, and set poor Tony's leg. Such visits were bright spots to the crippled woman, and so much did her sunny smile and calm, unshaken faith encourage and inspire her visitor, that it is difficult to say on which side lay the most profit and enjoyment.

Chrissie's earnings were falling very short now, day by day. The sweet, bright days of early summer were over, the August sun shone intensely hot every day for

many hours, and the glare on the dusty London streets often made the frail little girl feel sick and faint. Rich London folk were leaving town, glad to exchange its sultry, stifling atmosphere for the cool, refreshing breezes blowing in from the sea. The Park was almost forsaken, and Rotten Row bore few prints of horses' feet. The demand for flowers was falling off, and the blossoms in Chrissie's basket withered and drooped so quickly, that the child would often make scarcely any profit out of her day's takings. Few noticed or gave anything to the blind man at her side. And so, evening after evening, they turned into Lamb Court with heavy hearts, and often went supperless to bed.

The privation he suffered told severely on little Nat. His tiny, thin face grew thinner, and his cheerful prattle was almost silenced. Chrissie watched him with anxious fears, and even old Donald, though unable to see the change in the little pinched face, discerned something amiss with his darling boy. He felt him to be lighter and thinner when in his arms, and sighed bitterly as he thought how helpless he was to find for the child the food and comfort needed, and how he who could and should have provided it was far away, unheard of now for long years. The old man cherished a feeling of bitter resentment against his son, for his sinful and cowardly desertion of his family. For his fall in an hour of weakness Donald had no sympathy or pity, and it was possible that a feeling of uncertainty respecting

his father's forgiveness had helped to deter Martin Cameron from returning home years ago.

How Chrissie longed to talk to Granny again during those dark days! She hardly knew how to find daily food for them all, and longed for a kindly word to help her on in the bitter struggle with poverty. Yet still, though so lonely, she did not despair. The little prayer Granny had taught her was quite learned by heart now, and she and Nat always said it softly together every day.

One evening, when Chrissie went to the little shop for some bread, she inquired, as usual, for her old friend Meg.

'She ain't up yet,' said the same black-haired little ragamuffin; 'but I telled her you'd been, and she said as how you was to come and see her next time. Will yer come now?'

'Yes,' said Chrissie, 'I'll come; but I'm very sorry she's no better.'

So Tebby, as she was called, took Chrissie through a filthy little back room, a little darker than the shop in front, and, after climbing a staircase which was remarkably like an ill-built chimney, Chrissie found herself under a low, lean-to roof, and was introduced to Meg by Tebby's shrill voice announcing, 'Mother, here's Chris come; turn over and speak to her;' after which she disappeared again, noisily, down the dark vortex of the dirty staircase.

It was a dark, hot, ill-smelling little room. One broken chair and a few boxes were its sole furniture, unless some scattered heaps of straw and rags could be included as such. From the one window in the roof nothing whatever was to be seen, partly because a high blackened wall immediately faced it within three feet, and partly because the few remaining panes of glass were entirely covered, inside and out, with dirt and soot. The empty spaces were blocked up with rags and paper.

The atmosphere was close and poisonous beyond description. Fortunately for the occupants, the tiling above was anything but air-tight, and had no ceiling beneath it, though this system of ventilation was certainly open to objection in wet weather. The sun shone brightly without, but it was some few moments before Chrissie was able to make out that, in a corner of the floor, on some rags, lay something which she supposed must be Meg; but it didn't stir, so she drew a little nearer, and spoke.

'Meg,' she said, 'how are you? Chris has come to see you.'

Though her voice was much quieter than Tebby's, it roused the sick woman, and she turned a little, and murmured, 'Chris come?' but the movement hurt her severely, and she groaned in pain.

'Are you very ill, Meg?' said the child, kneeling down beside her. 'What is the matter?'

'Oh, my side hurts dreadful,' said Meg, 'and I can't get up. Yes, I'm very ill. How dark it is! I ain't seen a bit o' daylight for weeks, and ain't likely to, I suppose.'

'Meg, I'm so sorry for you,' said the little girl; 'what can I do? You look so uncomfortable; and oh, it's so hot and close up here! Can I get you anything? What have you had to eat?'

'Hot! I should think it was!' returned the sick woman; 'I can't hardly breathe, and I hate to be stived up in this dark hole. Eat? no, I can't eat nothink,' she added; 'I had a cup o' tea this morning.'

'Meg, shall I sing to you?' asked Chrissie. 'I've heard something so pretty since I saw you last.'

'You may if you like,' returned Meg wearily. 'I don't care.'

This was not very encouraging, but Chrissie began, and softly sang through the verse which Granny had taught her. Meg lay with her eyes shut, and did not speak or move as the child's voice ceased.

'Meg,' began Chrissie again, 'do you know Granny told me that Jesus is our Sun, that He died to take our sins away, that we might live in His home where it is all sunshine. Did you ever hear of Him?'

Meg stirred again, and said rather sulkily, 'Sunshine! I've a'most forgotten what it's like. Sin! There's plenty o' that about here, I reckon.'

'But Jesus died to save us from it, and to pardon us,'

persisted the child. 'Sin is like darkness, and Jesus is the Sun.'

'Sin!—darkness!—Jesus!' repeated the sick woman feebly, with knit brows. 'No, I don't understand. I'm an awful sinner, I know; but I don't see why you need ha' telled me that just now when I'm so bad. Oh, the pain's dreadful!' she added, with a deep gasp and groan.

Little Chrissie looked distressed. She did not know what to do for her friend. 'Meg,' she went on presently, 'I don't know what to do for your dreadful pain; but wouldn't you like Jesus to take away all your darkness and sin, as He has taken away mine?'

'I don't know, I'm sure. Yes, I guess I would,' returned Meg slowly and doubtfully. 'But it ain't at all likely. He don't care for the likes o' me. I'm a dark wicked woman, and you're a dear good little girl.'

'Oh no!' put in Chrissie, 'I'm not. I'm often very wicked; and I want the light just as much as you do, Meg. But won't you ask Him, if you've so many sins, to take them all away?'

'No, child; never mind me,' said Meg sadly. 'I don't understand; it's just all dark everywhere.' And to all her words about the light of life, Chrissie met only with the same weary response, 'I don't understand; no, I don't understand.' And so the little girl had to say 'good-bye' to poor, dark, suffering Meg, and grope her way down the staircase again.

In the stuffy little room behind the shop sat Tebby, busily engaged in demolishing a huge slice of bread and treacle.

'Poor Meg's very ill,' said Chrissie, as she reached the foot of the stairs at last in safety; 'and how dark and hot it is up there! Couldn't you open the window, Tebby, and clear off some of the dirt and cobwebs, and let a little light come in?'

Tebby's black eyes opened wide, and she grinned from ear to ear. 'The winder ain't never been opened, as I knows on, or cleaned either,' she replied, as though the idea was so entirely novel and original as to be quite amusing. 'Mother's all right. Why, me and Joe and father, and all the little uns, sleeps there every night,' she went on, taking an enormous bite, like a half-moon, out of the slice in her hand.

'Has any doctor been to see Meg?' asked Chrissie.

'Doctor! No,' returned Tebby, with her mouth full; 'and we don't want none. Mother says as how we'd all be turned out, perhaps, if the doctor come nigh; and we're very comfortable, and don't want nobody meddling. Have some bread and treacle?'

But Chrissie declined. Not that she could not have eaten a hearty meal; but the child felt that she must have been hungry indeed to have been tempted to take food amid such surroundings. And yet Tebby regarded them not only with composure, but with complacency, such a state of things being quite her idea of 'comfort.'

Yes, and of hundreds like her; and it is thus that not only vice and wickedness, but dirt, disease, and death, are actually cherished and clung to by their victims, and any attempt on the part of others to set them free resented as meddling, and strenuously resisted. Chrissie's suggestions respecting sanitary reform and medical advice were not attended, therefore, with very remarkable success; she gave it up in sheer despair, and took her leave, promising Tebby to come and see Meg again before long. The child little guessed how many troubled weeks would pass away before she would be able to fulfil that promise.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

'E'en now, perchance my feet
Are slipping on the brink;
It may be I'm nearer home,
Nearer than now I think.'

HOTTER and hotter grew the August days. Even in the open airy parks not a breath seemed to be stirring, and crowds of panting, wearied Londoners thronged every seaside resort, leaving the west end of the great city almost deserted. No rain had fallen for weeks, and the fierce rays of the unclouded, burning sun licked up the water sprinkled on the dusty streets by the ever-busy water-carts, almost as soon as it fell. In the stifling back streets and courts matters were still worse. The air there, never pure and healthful, now became stagnant and fever-laden. The feeble and sickly drooped and

died; disease in some form was in almost every house, and the black-spotted typhus showed itself threateningly here and there.

Old Donald had, however, recovered his usual health, and since the warm weather had lost his cough; but little Nat grew visibly paler and thinner, and often could hardly manage the daily walk to the Park gate. Chrissie's heart ached with a terrible dread, as she watched her little brother, lest the fever should seize him in its deadly grasp. But, as one after another sickened in Lamb Court, and, while some struggled feebly back to life, many were cut down in a few days, Nat escaped. Tim was among the earliest victims, and lay dangerously ill for weeks. Often Chrissie and Nat would shudder with horror as they heard his delirious ravings; but Tim had a robust and vigorous frame, and when the fierce onslaught of fever was over, he rallied, and showed signs of recovery.

'I wish you'd go down and see whether Tim's getting better,' said Nat one evening to his sister; 'he's been ill for weeks, and I should like to know how he's getting on. I don't feel angry with him now, Chrissie, for hurting my poor Tony. I think I can forgive him.'

Chrissie was rather surprised at the request, but, though she had a great dread of the rough boy, readily consented to go, for she would have done anything to please Nat; so, taking their favourite picture, at his special request, she made her way down to the room

where the sick lad lived. Chrissie knew that Tim's drunken, swearing mother was out at 'The Lamb,' and therefore he was likely to be alone. A feeble 'Come in' responded to her gentle tap at the door, and she pushed it a little open, and peeped cautiously inside. A pale, emaciated figure, in which she would never have recognised the big, blustering Tim, lay on the bed. No one else was in the room.

'Who's that?' sharply demanded Tim. 'What do you want?'

'It's me—Chrissie,' his little visitor replied. 'May I come in, Tim? Nat wants to know how you are.'

'Tell Nat to mind his own business,' said the boy crossly. 'No, I won't have you here,' he went on, with a fierce gleam in his eyes.

Chrissie drew back, but the thought of Nat's request prevented her retreating altogether, and she ventured to speak again. 'But, Tim, we're sorry you're so ill, and if you're all alone, mayn't I come in and show you my picture?'

For a moment Tim wavered at the bait of a picture to look at, but the next, his evil, savage nature gained the day, for he had always hated the sight of Chrissie and Nat, since the day he had been so cruel to them and their little dog. Raising himself, by a desperate effort, on his elbow, he called out hoarsely, 'Get along, I tell you. I won't have you interfering with me.

Take that!' and he seized a broken plate from the floor at his side, and flung it furiously at the little girl, dropping back, exhausted and panting, on the heap of straw on which he lay.

Chrissie saw the movement in time, and drew back hastily, but she had no need to fear the blow, for the plate fell in a dozen pieces almost at Tim's own feet.

The little girl ascended the stairs, slowly and sadly, to their own room; and poor, dark Tim, who had 'hated the light, lest his deeds should be reproved,' fainted away alone on his miserable bed.

Nat was disappointed and grieved when his sister came back; but the children dared not make any further friendly advances towards the sick boy, and they little thought how different would be Tim's next greeting to the little visitor whom he had so roughly rejected.

One afternoon, shortly after this, the little party were at their usual post at the Park gates. Chrissie had taken hardly anything all day, and only one penny had been dropped in the blind man's hat. Nat was crouching down on the dusty path, close to his sister's basket, for he could stand on his little aching weary feet no longer, and even Tony seemed exhausted in the sultry heat, as he sat with lolling tongue at his master's feet. The leaves from the elms and chestnuts in the parks were falling, dried and curled already, and the white pave-

ment opposite reflected painfully the hot blaze of the sun.

Suddenly a terrible ringing cry was heard, and a number of men and boys, in the midst of a dense cloud of dust, appeared round the corner of a street a little distance away, running at full speed. As they drew nearer, that most awful warning cry ever heard on the streets rang out on the heavy air, 'Mad dog! mad dog!'

On they came, and now Chrissie could see the infuriated creature, foaming at the mouth, and dashing along with frightful speed. A 'cabby,' on the stand near, saw him too, and grasping his whip in the middle, and swinging its heavy butt-end in the air, he sprang from his box into the road. The animal swerved aside, however, as he came nearer, and 'cabby,' at the last moment, sprang into his seat again, with ashen face. Do not call him cowardly. He had a wife and dear children at home; and that man must be a hero indeed who could calmly face and strike down a beast whose bite would certainly entail a horrible and revolting death.

The foremost of the crowd with their heavy sticks had almost overtaken the dog, when, with another desperate spring, the furious animal distanced them again, and, to every one's horror, made directly for the little group at the Park gate.

Old Donald had scarcely discerned what the commo-

tion was about, for although, as is usual with the blind, his hearing was very quick, the other sounds had drowned the cry of 'Mad dog!'

Nat had sprung to his feet, and was standing by his sister, pale and trembling, but expecting every moment to see the dog struck down by the men in pursuit. Not till the creature was within a few yards of them did he realize their own danger. When this flashed upon the child's mind, his first thought was for his sister, and, in an instant, the noble little fellow sprang in front of her, and flung his arms about her neck with a wild cry of terror.

Just then a policeman came running up, and, drawing his truncheon, aimed a heavy blow at the savage brute. Alas! too late!—just *one* moment too late! The cruel teeth of the mad dog had buried themselves, through the ragged coat, in the thin white arm of the little lad! One bitter cry of pain and agony, and then the little face whitened like death, the arms relaxed their fond clasp, and, had not Chrissie caught him, Nat would have fallen senseless at her feet.

The dog was stretched, the same moment, bleeding in the dust; but with what horror-stricken faces the fast-gathering crowd closed round the fainting, wounded boy!

'My Nat! Oh, my darling child!' cried the blind man, in an agony of grief and terror. 'Give him to me, I say!' he added, groping his way toward Chrissie, who

was vainly trying to rouse her brother to consciousness, and to stay the bleeding from his arm.

'Grandfather, he's fainted! Oh, what shall we do?' she said in distress. 'How shall we get him home? Nat! dear Nat! look up, and speak to Chrissie!' she went on. But Nat neither moved nor spoke.

At this moment Tony, who had till now slunk out of sight in terror, bounded forward to meet a gentleman coming out of the Park. He recognised a friend. The intelligent, grateful little dog remembered the kind missionary who had set his broken leg, and the recognition was mutual. The young man spoke to the dog, and then pressed through the crowd, and found the two children whom he had before befriended in trouble.

Mr. Grey saw at a glance the awful nature of the boy's injury, therefore allowed the blood to flow freely from the wound, that the poison might, if possible, be prevented from entering the circulation, and, by the pressure of a large vein, checked the return of blood to the heart.

Chrissie endeavoured to soothe her grandfather while this was being done, and of course the old man had no idea who it was that was helping them in their distress. Mr. Grey knew that the little lad needed the most prompt and skilful treatment; so, calling cabby from his stand, he said to Chrissie:

'Now, my child, you will have to trust me with your

little brother. The only hope for him is in the hospital. I will take him there myself, and come and see you to-night, if you will stay with your grandfather, and get him safely home. You would not be admitted if you came with me, and this poor old man will need all your care, Chrissie,' he added softly.

The tears gathered again in the little girl's eyes, and a look of intense pain clouded her face, but she gave way to her friend's wishes, and yielded her loved Nat into his arms. But the old man absolutely refused, at first, to part with his boy, and some time was lost before he could be persuaded that the child's removal to the hospital without delay was his only chance of life. Then he yielded, but the shock and grief had so unnerved him, that it was with the greatest difficulty that he reached his home.

'Drive as fast as you can,' said Mr. Grey to cabby, as he stepped into the cab, with the slender little lad in his arms. Nat was still insensible, and his friend felt the gravest apprehension lest he should hardly reach the hospital in time to place him alive in the doctor's hands.

So desperate and pressing a case was at once admitted, and received immediate attention from the house surgeon. The feeble, flickering life awoke once more, and when the wound was dressed, Nat lay on his little white bed, conscious again, but without the smallest recollection of the events of the last few hours. Mr. Grey waited

down-stairs till a more favourable report was sent him by the nurse than he at first had dared to hope for, and he was admitted for a few moments to see the child.

'Where am I?' said Nat feebly, as his friend knelt down by his side. 'I know your face; you cured my Tony, you did. Is this heaven? and where are Chrissie and grandfather?'

Mr. Grey smiled, and said, 'You are comfortable now, Nat, are you not? and you must lie quite still. No, this is not heaven; but it is a very happy place, and Chrissie and grandfather will come and see you soon.' The child seemed quite content, and, as perfect quiet was most essential, Mr. Grey left him in ignorance of what had happened, and, bidding him 'Good-night,' left the hospital and made his way at once to Lamb Court.

Old Donald welcomed eagerly enough now the visitor to whom before he had so rudely refused to listen. He was waiting in deepest anxiety for expected tidings. 'Oh, that the gospel tidings,' said the missionary to himself, 'might, after all, find acceptance even in this stubborn heart!' but he made no allusion to it to-night, merely imparting all the comfort and hope he could to the distressed old man and the tearful little girl, and then took his leave, promising to fetch them both to see Nat the following afternoon, which happened to be a 'visiting day' at the hospital.

And so the blind man and Chrissie lay down to rest

that night for the first time without their Nat. The little sunbeam in the home was gone. How dark it was! Even Tony whined restlessly, and refused for a long while to settle for the night, and Chrissie had to say her little prayer alone. After that she cried herself to sleep.



CHAPTER VIII.

REFLECTED LIGHT.

'A few more struggles here,
A few more partings o'er,
A few more toils, a few more tears,
And we shall weep no more.'



NAT, in his comfortable cot, slept peacefully most of the night. A soft, dim light shone in the large airy ward, and now and again the gentle step of the night nurse crossed the floor, as she flitted from cot to cot, watching the sleeping children, or tending and soothing those awake in pain. Nothing else broke the stillness of the night, except an occasional moan from some little sufferer, or the fretful cry of wakefulness and weariness, soon hushed and quieted by the loving woman's voice, as she lulled the child to rest in her arms, or applied some soothing remedy for the weary pain.

In the pale light of the early dawn Nat awoke. The stars were just fading before approaching day, but as the child's eyes turned towards the window, they caught the farewell glimmering of the morning star. Nat's arm felt very stiff and painful, and he tried hard to recall to his mind the events of the previous day, being greatly puzzled at finding himself in such a wonderful place. Where, too, was Chrissie? and who could be taking care of him? Wherever he might be, it was clearly not out of reach of the stars, and he thought he could remember some one saying that it was not heaven. No, it was not heaven, that was very plain, for his arm hurt him very much, and he could not move it at all. What could have happened? But all was confusion and perplexity when he tried to think, and, in the midst of wondering, his eyes rested on a beautiful picture on the opposite wall, which almost made him forget his pain. There was a figure in the centre which reminded him strangely of their picture at home, only the head had no thorn-crown, only a beautiful glory, and the hand carried no shining lamp, but rested on the head of a little child about Nat's size, while an infant nestled on the other arm, and a group of little children gathered round. Others, too, were coming, led by their mothers or carried in their arms. Nat thought this picture was even prettier than his own, and lay gazing at it, in wonder and admiration, till the day-nurse in her spotless cotton dress came to his side, and, with a kind smile,

asked him how he felt this morning, and whether he was ready for a basin of bread and milk.

'Please,' said Nat, 'I'm very comfortable, only my arm hurts me, and I'm hot and thirsty; the milk would be nice; but oh, I want to know first,' he added, 'where I am, and if Chrissie and grandfather are here! I can't remember anything.'

Nurse stooped over the boy as he spoke, and laid her cool hand on his brow. Her face grew grave as she felt its burning heat, and marked the hot flush glowing on the little wasted cheeks; but her tone was cheerful and bright as she replied:

'My darling, they brought you here yesterday because your arm had been bitten by a dog. This place is a hospital, and we are doing all we can for you, and hope you will soon be well again. Don't fret about Chrissie and grandfather; they are not here, but I daresay they will come to see you this afternoon.'

'And are you taking care of me?' inquired the child.

'Yes, dear; I am the nurse, and will do for you all that you need. You will be very happy here, my little Nat, and when you are better, there are plenty of toys and picture books for you.'

Nat's eyes glistened with pleasure, in spite of his pain, and he said:

'Please, nurse, is that Jesus in the picture up there? It is something like mine, only there are little children in it.'

'Yes, dear, that is Jesus,' said nurse. 'He is blessing those little ones, for He loves them. Does Nat love Him?'

'Oh yes!' said the child, with beaming face; 'He's taken the naughty, bad feelings out of my heart, and shined away all the darkness. He's my Star, my Sun—mine and Chrissie's.'

Nurse smiled at the child's ingenuous reply, and, kissing him, she told him to lie quite still and look at the picture, and then she set about her morning duties in the ward, giving the little patients their breakfasts, and preparing them for the doctor's visit. Another nurse, however, brought Nat's bread and milk, and several more came in to see him, for his sad case had excited considerable interest among the hospital staff. Nat had never eaten such a delicious breakfast in his life, but half the allotted quantity satisfied him. He had a sad ordeal to pass through, poor child, when the doctors came. The dressing of the arm was a very painful process, and the wound had to be carefully examined, too, by several surgeons. He tried to be as patient and quiet as possible, but the excitement and pain tried the already exhausted child severely. It was over at last, however, and toward noon he slept again, and awoke refreshed.

Meanwhile old Donald had passed an almost sleepless night. But no persuasion would induce him to lie still, for he was in the most feverish anxiety to reach his

darling, and counted the hours till Mr. Grey might be expected to come and take them to the hospital. It is true that he was not without suspicion that their kind friend was none other than the missionary to whom he had so sternly refused to listen a few weeks ago. But he said nothing, for this was no time to show any further hostility, and, besides, the old man felt really grateful for the kind and ready help given in such an extremity.

Mr. Grey did not keep them long in anxiety, but appeared quite early in the afternoon, ready to fulfil his promise. Fortunately the intense heat had somewhat abated, or old Donald would have been scarcely equal to the long walk before him. On the way Mr. Grey gave the most cheering account of the comfort and attention by which Nat was surrounded, and showed the far better prospect of recovery there would be for him under such care, hoping to reconcile both grandfather and sister to the child's continued absence.

When they reached the hospital, and passed through the bright, cheerful wards, Chrissie was almost as much bewildered and astonished as her little brother had been by all that she saw. Plenty of air and light streamed in on the pictured walls and rows of cosy little cots. Groups of convalescent children, here and there, played quietly with an abundance of toys, and sick ones sat up in their cots with trays of toys before them. Flowers were freely distributed on all the tables; and although

there were pain and disease on every hand, order and happiness seemed to prevail.

How Nat's eyes glistened with pleasure as he caught sight of his dear sister and grandfather, with Mr. Grey, coming up the ward.

'My boy! My darling!' exclaimed the old man, as Chrissie led him to a chair at the head of the cot, and he heard Nat's voice once more, as he bent lovingly over him.

'Oh, dear, dear grandfather, I've been looking for you and Chrissie! I'm so glad you've come!' returned the child, drawing down the blind man's head close to his own, till the bright curls and the scanty grey locks mingled on the white pillow. 'And don't fret about me,' he went on, 'my arm isn't very bad; and oh, this is such a lovely place, grandfather! Isn't it, Chrissie?' he added, appealing to his sister, that she might help him to convey his impressions to his grandfather. 'And everybody's so kind to me, and they feed and take care of me in this beautiful soft bed. Look, Chrissie! Real sheets and a blanket! And so clean and white! And, grandfather, I can see my star through the window over there, and the early sunshine came in this morning, only they shut it out when it grew too hot.'

'But oh, Nat, I can't do without you at home!' wailed the old man. 'You're all the sunshine I've got; it's quite dark, my boy, there now.'

'But, grandfather,' said the child softly, 'won't you

let Jesus shine there? He'll make it brighter for you than I can.'

The blind man made no reply, only his head dropped on his hands, and two or three big tears stole between his fingers, and showed that he was not unmoved by the little lad's appeal.

Meanwhile Mr. Grey had a few minutes' talk with the nurse at the other end of the ward.

'What is thought of your little patient?' he inquired anxiously.

'Well, you see, sir,' nurse replied, 'we can't say just yet. He slept last night, but he is flushed and heated now, and I fear fever may run high. He's a frail little fellow, and couldn't do battle with much, but we will do all we can for him. The worst danger, that of hydrophobia, lies beyond our power to avert, though of course every means have been taken to ward it off. But *my* opinion is,' she added softly, 'that the dear child has no suffering to dread. He is on the borders of heaven. I've seen many a little one go, sir.'

'Happy child!' said Mr. Grey, though the tears rose in his eyes. 'But his poor grandfather! it will break his heart to lose the little lad!' Then, thanking nurse, he went back to the little group.

Chrissie was turning over a beautiful book of Scripture pictures which had been left on the bed, and the children talked of them together.

'The little lame boy Eric, over there, brought me

this,' said Nat. 'He's been very ill, but can walk about on crutches now; and he can read, Chrissie. That picture is Jesus preaching to the people on the mountain, and Eric says the words He spoke are in the Bible.'

'Shall I tell you what some of those words were, Nat?' said Mr. Grey, coming and sitting down by the children. 'You know that He called Himself the Light of the world. More than that, He told His disciples that they were to shine, too, in the world, though their light could never be so bright or so pure as His. Do you know where the moon gets her light from, Nat?'

'No, Mr. Grey, I never thought,' said the child. 'Doesn't she shine of herself?'

'No, Nat, the moon hasn't any light of her own, but she has the wonderful sunlight falling on her, and so she takes it up and shines by it, so that others see the light; and see it, too, when the sun is out of sight. And so, my boy, whatever light or brightness we have comes from Jesus, and He bids us let it shine out to others. "Let your light," He says, "so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Those were His words to His disciples that day.'

Nat listened with great wide-open eyes.

'Light and gladness go together, children,' Mr. Grey went on. '"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness

for the upright in heart." That is why heaven is so glad a place. It is full of joy because it is full of God's light. "They need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light."'

'I should like to see it,' said Nat thoughtfully.

Mr. Grey made no reply, but he looked very earnestly into the face of the little speaker. Perhaps he thought Nat would not have to wait very long. But their pleasant talk was soon cut short, for nurse came to summon the visitors away, fearing any continued excitement for her little patient. So Donald and Chrissie had to say 'good-bye,' promising to come again soon.

When they left the hospital, Mr. Grey ventured to offer a few kindly words to the blind man about the True Light whom his little grandson had already accepted and rejoiced in, with such simple, unwavering faith. But he met with little encouragement. It is true Donald did not absolutely refuse to listen, as he had done at first, but he made little or no reply, and Mr. Grey was quite unable to decide whether his words had been heeded or not. However, when they parted, and he grasped the poor man's hand, Donald replied:

'I can't thank you enough for all your goodness, sir, to my little lad. What could I in my blindness, and this little one here, have done alone? I don't know much about what you say of the Light of the world, but *you* have been a blessed light to us.'

'You are indeed welcome, my friend, to any service I have rendered you,' returned Mr. Grey. 'Remember, *all* light is from Him, and He is shining on you, even now, though you know it not. "May the Lord lift upon you the light of His countenance!"'

And so they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

LIGHT IN THE VALLEY.

'Do you mourn when another star
Shines out in the glittering sky?
Do you weep when the raging voice of war
And the sounds of conflict die?

Then why should your tears run down,
And your heart be sorely riven,
For another gem in the Saviour's crown,
And another soul in heaven?'



HAT night Nat was worse. As the shades of evening fell, fever ran high, and his mind wandered. 'Jesus—shine,' he murmured. 'Darkness!—fill with light.' Fragments of the little prayer which Chrissie and he had so often repeated together fell from his lips. Then he would call pitifully for his grandfather and sister, or start and shudder, in sudden terror, as the dreadful scene of the preceding day gradually returned upon his memory.

'Poor little lad!' said one of the nurses. 'He'll never stand much of that. He had no strength to begin with, and this burning fever will soon exhaust him. We'll not have him with us long.'

And so Nat tossed and moaned the long night through; the inflammation increasing in the wounded arm, and the fever gaining a deadlier hold. His kind nurse watched and tended him with the utmost care, though many other little patients made constant demands on time and strength. Yes, and love too; for without that, though every duty be most strictly fulfilled, the nursing of little children would ever be incomplete. But Nurse Neal *did* love them, and, as she caught from time to time fragments of his favourite verse from Nat's lips, as he murmured fitfully of the 'Morning Star,' and 'the Light of life,' she thanked God that this little one was 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' for she felt quite sure that for these weary little feet 'travelling days' would soon be done.

Very bitterly did poor Chrissie miss her little brother from her side. Still, she was glad that he was spared the tiring heat and long standing, and that such food as he was able to take was now plentifully supplied him. She and her grandfather had to live now on the scantiest fare.

Though Chrissie had not spoken of him again, her mind was often full of her absent father. Oh, that he would only return and end this weary anxiety and

long waiting! But she had almost ceased to expect him now. Hope was fast dying out, for was not her father very likely dead? and then, though he had been 'the light of his life' once, her grandfather would have, perhaps, no welcome for him now, even if he came back, for he never spoke his son's name. And what if little Nat were taken away into God's light and she left alone? How could she 'shine' then, for, with her grandfather closing his heart to the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, and any intercourse with Granny forbidden, would not the dim light just kindled in her own heart be soon quenched amid the surrounding darkness? Ah, Chrissie, it is a dark picture, truly! but know that this 'marvellous light' shall never wane, but only broaden and brighten into perfect day; your path in life shall be guided none the less really and certainly than was that of the journeying Israelites, before whom the cloudy pillar always moved to lead them in the way, and became 'in the night a pillar of fire to give them *light*.'

One afternoon, just as Chrissie and her grandfather were preparing to start for the hospital to see Nat, there came a feeble, hesitating tap at the door, and, on Chrissie opening it, there stood before her a pale, emaciated lad, whom she had at first some difficulty in recognising as Tim. He had been terribly reduced by the ravages of fever, and by the want of any proper food during his tardy and imperfect recovery. His old, tattered clothes

hung loosely on his bony limbs, his face was white and drawn, and, as he stood looking at his former visitor with a somewhat sheepish air, Chrissie could have no feeling toward the wretched lad but that of profoundest pity.

'I jest come,' he began, 'to know how the little un was. Somebody telled me as how he had been bit by a dog, and is in 'ospital; and I'm sure I'm real sorry, I am, and I won't throw nothink at you agen.'

Here he stopped abruptly.

'Nat's very ill,' replied Chrissie; 'we're going to see him to-day. He'll be glad to hear you're up again, Tim; but you look very bad yet. I should hardly have known you.'

'No,' replied the boy gloomily; 'I don't hardly know myself; and please,' he added awkwardly, 'I thought as how you'd be a-going to see Nat to-day,—will you gi'e him this? I ain't got nothink else to send,—and say I'm awful sorry he's so bad, and nobody here shan't touch you while he's away.'

With these words, Tim produced a white rosebud he had carefully hidden before, and gave it to Chrissie. The little girl was a good deal surprised at such gentle words from the rough lad, and, though he certainly did not look as though his gallant offer of protection was of much value in his present condition, yet she was grateful for the kindly feeling it manifested.

Chrissie had not guessed how brightly her little light

had already shone amid the darkness of sin around her, or how here, at least, the powers of darkness were retreating before it.

'Oh yes, I'll take it!' she replied. 'Nat will be so pleased. Thank you, Tim. Come and see me again.'

But the boy had vanished.

It was only a common little bud, though fresh and sweet, that Chrissie held in her hand, but it had been given by the rough, wild boy in token of repentance for his unkind treatment of her gentle little brother, who now lay suffering, perhaps dying. Tim had been touched, too, by Chrissie's kindly sympathy, shown to him in his illness, although at the time he had so roughly rejected it.

When they reached the hospital, Chrissie was grieved to see the change in her brother. The fever had passed away, but it had left the little sufferer so weak and faint that he could not chat with his dear ones as before, and his feeble voice was scarcely audible. But a look of glad pleasure lighted up his face when he saw them, and Tim's white rosebud was received with the warmest interest and satisfaction.

'Poor Tim looks so bad, Nat,' said Chrissie; 'but he's much kinder, and he's really very sorry for you, or he wouldn't have sent this.'

'Give him my dear love,' returned the child, 'and thank him ever so much; for, Chrissie,' he went on slowly,

'I don't think I'll ever see him again. My arm doesn't get any better, and I feel so weak and tired. I asked nurse this morning if perhaps I should never get better, and she said maybe Jesus might call me to His own beautiful, bright home, where all is sunlight and joy; and I should so like to go. Chrissie, don't cry,' said the little fellow fondly; 'you will come, and grandfather too, soon.'

He lay back on his pillows, exhausted and panting, with the white rosebud clasped in his hand, and Chrissie laid down her head beside him, while her tears fell thick and fast.

'Grandfather,' went on Nat presently, while the little thin white hand was folded in that of the old man, —'grandfather, you'll *promise* to come! You will—look to — the Light of life, — so bright, — my Star, — my Sun.'

Then his voice dropped and failed again, and the blind man could hardly restrain his bitter sorrow, as he bent over the feeble child, and felt how fast, how very fast, he was slipping away from him.

'Yes, my darling,' he murmured between his sobs. He would have promised anything for Nat's sake. The child looked satisfied, and closed his eyes wearily. Even so slight an exertion had over-taxed his failing strength, and they had to leave him with heavy hearts and sorrowful forebodings. And these were only too soon realized. The next day, a hurried message reached

Chrissie, that if she wished to see her little brother once more, she must come at once. When she and her grandfather reached Nat's side, Chrissie thought she saw something very like the radiant happiness of old Granny shining now in the little white face on the pillow. The fires of fever had quite died out, but there was no power to rally, and the feeble life was fast ebbing away. Chrissie knelt at his side and spoke his name, but the child was unconscious, and his breathing was short and irregular. The little feet were already treading the dark, shadowy valley; but the golden gates of heaven were thrown open to receive them, and surely there streamed some of the light of heaven on that upturned face! Once Nat's eyes rested on his dear ones, and he called them softly by name;—then they seemed to turn to some bright, attractive vision of glory, visible only to dying eyes.

'Jesus—Light'—he whispered, as he gazed upwards. No look of pain crossed the unclouded brow, no 'fear of evil' darkened the path through the valley. With clear, undimmed eyes, with stedfast, unfaltering feet, passed on the little traveller into the city of light; and when the summer sun sank toward the west, and flung rich golden and crimson glories over the clouds, and long dark shadows on the earth below, the fluttering eyelids drooped, the fitful breathing ceased, and little Nat dwelt amid eternal glories. Happy child! 'The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for

brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.'

And as the evening star looked down for the last time on the face of the little sleeper, it glistened, too, on Tim's white rosebud, resting in the clasp of the childish hand. Who knows but some life-giving ray from the Bright and Morning Star had been reflected, through this young life, on the giver of that lowly flower?

For a time Chrissie thought her grandfather would never rally from the shock of Nat's death. It had well-nigh broken the old man's heart. His health entirely gave way, and he was quite unable to rise from his bed. Chrissie feared to leave him alone all day, yet her flowers must be sold, or there was no food for either of them. In this extremity she ventured to ask Nell one morning if she would be so good as to come and sit with her grandfather a bit, for she knew that her friend was at home out of work just now. Kind Nell readily consented, and Chrissie started alone with her basket of flowers. It was a sad, weary day to her, poor child, and she was most thankful when it was over, and she could turn homewards at night. The constant presence of her little brother had become so much a part of her own life, that Chrissie was unable to believe that he had really gone; and though the Light of life, in which the little girl was now beginning to walk, kept her from sinking in the darkness of despair, she was often depressed and

troubled when she thought of her grandfather's feeble condition, and her own utter loneliness, should he be taken away.

Nell nursed old Donald most carefully for days, and made him as comfortable as she could in his miserable bed. One evening, when the blind man seemed getting a little better, Mr. Grey called. He had been from home, and had only just heard of little Nat's death. He was not surprised to find Donald broken down with his trouble.

'Oh, sir,' said the blind man, in reply to the missionary's words of sympathy, 'all that I love is taken from my life! First my son, and then my eyesight, and now—my little Nat!'

'When earthly lights dim and pale before your eyes, my friend, will you not turn to the Great Healer, the Sun of Righteousness? In His light you may "see light" yet.'

'Ah, it's too late now, sir,' was the sad reply; 'you don't know how I've shut my eyes to it. It was different with the little ones. *They* didn't know the light, and when they saw it they received it; but I, sir, knew it years back, and I hated it, and loved darkness best, and now He has left me to die in darkness. It's too late, sir, too late!'

'Donald Cameron,' said Mr. Grey very seriously, 'do you think if you had kept your eyes shut a long while, and then opened them, the blessed sun would

refuse to shine into them, and fill them with light again?'

'No, sir, I suppose not,' replied the old man slowly.

'And Christ says,' went on Mr. Grey, '"Look unto Me, and be ye saved." If you've looked away from Him so long, that is all the more reason you should turn from Him no longer.'

No answer came for a few minutes, and then Donald said sorrowfully, 'But I'm a dark, sinful old man, sir; I've been hating and condemning my own son, my dear lad Martin. He wandered and fell, it is true, but oh, he wasn't half so bad as I am!'

'My friend,' returned Mr. Grey, 'some light has shone into your heart already, or you would not know your own sin. Leave the darkness for ever to-day, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'

But the shadows lay heavy on the old man's heart, and though Mr. Grey left him with more hope than he had ever felt before, he longed for the 'morn to rise' on the dark heart.

'Chrissie,' said Donald that same evening, 'Nell tells me that old Granny often asks for you; I don't mind if you go in and see her again.'

'Oh, grandfather, may I?' returned Chrissie, with something more like a look of pleasure on her face than had rested there for many a day. 'I *should* like!'

And the next day she went, for Mr. Grey had interested some of his friends in Chrissie, and had thus been able so far to relieve their poverty, that the child did not fear that a few hours' absence from her post would cost them a meal.

It would be difficult to say which felt the most joy at meeting again, and though the pleasant little talk Granny and Chrissie had together was not unmingled with tears when they spoke of little Nat, yet it was a time of great refreshment and joy to both. And especially did the old woman rejoice to find how both the little ones had been walking in the light to which she had pointed them. Soon, probably, would old Granny join the one already gone to the land of light; but who shall say where the influence of her teaching shall cease? Verily 'they that be wise shall shine as the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.'

And, as the days went by, Nell's kind ministry continued, and Mr. Grey looked in now and again to see Donald. A new light began to shine in the old man's heart. Very gradually the day broke. A thick darkness had long held sway, but it was scattered and dispersed at last. With forgiveness and peace in his own heart came a passionate longing for his boy once more. The cold, unforgiving, harsh spirit all melted away, and the dear name that had scarcely passed his lips for years was now more often spoken than any. Little Chrissie

loved to talk of the father who had long been the subject of such anxious thought; and very earnestly her grandfather prayed that, before he should be called to join little Nat in the bright home above, his hand might grasp that of his son Martin once more, and Chrissie find the shelter of a father's care and love.



CHAPTER X.

A LATE SUNRISE.

'Pride ruled my will,
Remember not past years.'



FOLKESTONE HARBOUR at high tide presents a busy, amusing scene of life and activity. The few fishing-boats that have not been out to sea, but lying helplessly on their sides in a dreary expanse of mud, now right themselves, and ride at anchor, pointing their two bare masts upright again. In an incredibly short space of time their numbers are increased tenfold by the returning boats, whose sails come flocking like birds over the distant horizon, and, if anything of a breeze is blowing, dancing and careering round the end of the pier at the top of their speed, and then sliding in calmer water through the narrow entrance to the harbour in rapid succession. Soon

the little forest of masts, from many of which hang the brown nets to dry in place of the furled sail, almost hide the irregular row of antiquated red brick fishermen's cottages on the opposite side, nestling under the cliff. Between the houses and the water, at the end nearest the town, stands the fish market, now being rapidly filled with piles and baskets of glistening, gaping fish, brought up from the fishers' boats in smaller ones to the water's edge, and shouldered by stalwart men and boys in their varied fisher dress. With its background of old gabled cottages, quaint and motley in outline, the busy scene offers irresistible charms to the artist. Above the old red chimney tops St. Peter's Church stands out against the sky.

One evening late in September, the close of a calm, delicious autumn day, while the sun was sinking behind the downs, and casting deep shadows on the white cliffs, there might have been seen from the little lighthouse on the jetty a tiny trail of smoke and a faint streak of grey on the far horizon, denoting the approach of the Boulogne steamer. Let us take a nearer view of the vessel. Swiftly move her paddle-wheels, as, with regular strokes, they fling aside the milky-white foam in a widening wake from her stern, as her keel cuts the smooth water. Many passengers throng the deck; some quietly talking in little groups, and some in pairs, briskly pacing up and down, enjoying the bright sky, and chattering gaily of the delightful passage. But one figure, on the fore part of the deck, stands alone. It is that of a fine,

well-built man of perhaps forty years of age; but there is a slight stoop in the shoulders and a certain indefinable air of dejection about the attitude which seems more the result of mental suffering than bodily weariness. He is gazing towards those shining white cliffs over the waves with an intense, anxious yearning in his eyes. No wonder. It is the first sight of his native land for seven long years. And such troubled years!—years which have drawn sad lines of pain and care on the handsome face, and sprinkled the head with many a grey hair. But though sorrow, dark and bitter, has left its unmistakeable traces, the features are as yet unshadowed by the chill gloom of despair. A gleam of hope shines in those troubled eyes, —an eager hope, born of stedfast resolution.

Martin Cameron—for it is he—is once more turning his face homeward in true repentance, humbled and ashamed for his years of pride and cowardice, and firmly resolved to find his dear ones at any cost, only too anxious to make any amends still possible for his cruel desertion. But with repentance and hope there mingled in Martin's heart anxious forebodings. Could he hope to find no sad changes in that little home circle? What if there were no Nellie to welcome him! or even no little ones to respond to the long withheld fatherly affection with which his heart was full! Or would even his eldest, his darling Christine, only four years of age when he left home, remember, or feel any love towards a father whose conduct she was now growing old enough to understand

and resent? He did not anticipate much difficulty in tracing their present home; but he felt that at least it must be very uncertain what reception he might meet, and this feeling often made him feverishly anxious to reach them, that he might set his doubts at rest, and know what to hope for in the future.

Martin Cameron was not returning a poor man. During the first few years of his voluntary exile he had wandered from town to town in an aimless, listless manner, sometimes settling for a few months, and sometimes on the point of starting for home, and facing the taunts of his companions—a humiliating confession,—*anything*, so that he might have his Nellie and bairns once more. But his proud spirit always held him back from the fulfilment of any such resolutions of his better moments; and, as years passed by, conscience spoke less distinctly. At once and for ever he flung from him the foe that had wrought this bitter estrangement. He had never been the slave of drink, and felt now an indignant anger against the insidious enemy.

A proud, haughty, stubborn will had Martin, and though it had been the means of leading him into the deepest sin, it was also the means of raising him above those grosser forms of evil to which weaker natures fall an easy prey. But he would not submit that imperious will to the yoke of Christ. The spirit of the little child was wholly lacking in his heart, and so, in his own proud, blind self-will, he had stumbled on, 'walking in

darkness,' and knowing not whither he went. He rarely entered a place of worship, and by degrees gave up the old habit altogether.

After a time, being very fond of horses, and having had some experience with them, he obtained a good situation as coachman in a gentleman's family, where he earned high wages, and spent very little on his own needs. His master travelled a good deal, and Martin became so valued and respected a servant, that, whether the horses went or not, he was always in attendance. 'Cameron has his faults,' Mr. Gordon would say, 'and in many things I can't understand him at all; but he's a faithful servant, and a shrewd, capable fellow to have about one, and I'll never willingly part with him.' And so it came to pass that Martin followed his master to Germany and Italy, and thence to the south of France, where Mr. Gordon remained for six months. It was here, in this land of superstition and atheism, that the long dark night of rebellion and pride in Martin's soul was ended, and 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' streamed sweetly in, awakening to new life, and deep, sincere repentance.

One Sunday evening he had strayed into a little English Protestant church, attracted by the singing of a familiar tune, whose well-remembered strains reached him as he was loitering by. Often had Martin's voice and Nellie's blended in those sacred words, and, as he

listened to them to-night, how vividly they called back the images of his wife and children!—what a strange, powerful emotion was stirring at his heart! Allured by a strong fascination, he crept into a back seat, and sat unnoticed, with his head dropped on his hands, till the sounds ceased, and the little band of worshippers subsided into a peaceful waiting stillness in the dim light, while their pastor rose to give out his text.

Martin had meant to leave when the hymn was over, but, though close to the door, he felt he could not do so now, in this hushed silence, without attracting attention, so he only shrank a little farther back into the shadow, there to wait patiently till the close of the service. Martin had heard many a sermon before now,—yes, and listened to and criticised them,—but he had no intention of doing either to-night. Neither did he do so. But 'the word of God,' apart from preaching, 'is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.' And so Martin found it.

'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him.' Softly and clearly from the lips of the minister fell these words on his ear. Gentle, loving, unreproachful as they were, they cut deeply into Martin Cameron's heart. Against the terrors of the law, or the thunders of Sinai, his proud spirit would only have risen in repeated rebellion, ready to vindicate his own conduct, or at least to refuse any confession of sin. But these gracious words went straight

to his heart ere he had time to give their entrance a denial. They took for granted his sin, his wandering, his suffering, the anger of God against him; but, in the same breath, they offered healing, forgiveness, love! Love! wasn't that, of all things, what he needed? He had flung from him the best and dearest of earthly love. He had refused, hitherto, Divine love. In his heart Martin was a miserable man! And those tender words of God to idolatrous, sinful Israel awoke at last shame and remorse. Down deep into his soul, beneath the strong, proud will, they touched the very springs of life, 'discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.'

Directly the service was over, he slipped out unseen, but those gracious words rang still in his ears. And Martin Cameron did not try now to escape or silence them. They spoke, it is true, of 'Mine anger,' but it was 'turned away;' of 'backsliding,' but there was healing and love offered 'freely.' Well Martin knew by what means that love was his, at what cost, and by whose stripes we are healed,—that a Divine Victim had borne the burden of his sins, and that on Him had been laid 'the iniquity of us all.' The dark clouds of sin and rebellion, that had rested on his heart so long, were lifting and dispersing now, before the dawning sunlight. Sincere repentance was followed by free forgiveness, the darkness was past, and the True Light shone.

Mr. Gordon was almost electrified one morning, when

his servant presented himself with the announcement, 'If you please, sir, I shall wish to leave your service very shortly.'

'Leave me! impossible!' he cried. 'What is the matter? Have you anything to complain of? Want your wages raised? You cannot seriously be thinking of leaving me?'

'Sir,' Martin replied, 'you have been the kindest of masters; and as for my wages, I am afraid they are almost too high already. I have nothing to complain of, but I think you will not wish to detain me when you know my history.'

And then Martin gave his master a simple and frank account of his life, his home in England, his fall, his wandering, and his tardy repentance. Adding, 'And now you see, sir, my first duty and happiness lie with my wife and children. At any cost I will seek them out, if I may yet claim them once more.'

Mr. Gordon listened in astonishment. Here, then, was the key to much that he had quite failed to fathom in the character of his servant, whom, it was very plain, he was about to lose. After hearing such a story, he could give him, however, but one reply, namely, that though very sorry to lose him, he was at liberty to leave for England at once, without any formal notice, only stipulating that, should the search be fruitless, Martin would engage in no other service, but return to his old master.

Martin readily gave this promise, though refusing to admit for a moment the probability of its being redeemed.

'Well,' returned his master, 'I can't say that I hope it will be; still remember, Cameron, seven years may have wrought great changes.'

A shade passed over Martin's face at these words, as he thought of his delicate Nellie, and the slender hope he had of meeting her again. 'No, sir,' he said, 'while left alone I'll never engage to serve another while you are good enough to wish me back; but, God helping me, I will find and claim my own dear ones again.'

And so Martin turned his face homeward, and gazed lovingly on the white cliffs of his own country once more.

Among the bustling throng of passengers he stepped ashore with feelings of deepest emotion. In a sense he was home again, yet in another he was homeless. None, perhaps, amid the crowd which surrounded him more friendless and loveless than he. Yet was there strong hope in his heart, which shone out in his eyes, and a stedfast trust in the God who had forgiven, that He would go on to bless. Ah, Martin! God does readily forgive sin, truly repented of and renounced; but there is a reaping which none can escape if evil seed has been sown.

Divine pardon does away with the guilt, yea, forgets the *sin* itself; but its consequences, to some extent

are ever ours, and must be met and faced, either as alone and condemned we meet them, an awful retribution, or as a child forgiven and restored we meet them, sadly, it is true, in that they are the reminder of past sin, but not with despair, for the rod of justice buds and blossoms with promise and hope.

CHAPTER XI.

AMONG THE DARK SHADOWS.

'All are not taken! There are left behind
Living belovèds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a blessed thing.'



ARTIN went early the following morning to London, and thence at once to Dipford, his native place. As he left the little country station to walk into the village, how anxiously he glanced around in search of any familiar face. No; all strange. 'But what can I expect?' he said to himself; 'seven years will have removed many even from this quiet spot, and those who remain, whom I once knew, may be past recognition. My own little ones may even pass me unknown.' Eagerly he scanned the faces of the few children on the road about the ages of eight and ten years, but in none could he trace any resemblance to Christine or Nat. Martin's old cottage was quite at the

other end of the village. Should he go straight there, or make other inquiry first? His courage shrank from the former course. Either to come suddenly upon the dear home circle, or to find strange faces there and be turned away, would be more than he could bear; so Martin decided to look in at the well-remembered little shop at the corner, and there glean some intelligence. There was a new name over the door, but he went in.

It was a quaint little shop, offering a little of most things for sale, and was patronized by a large number of customers. Of the buxom dame who was slicing bacon behind the counter, Martin made his inquiry.

'Mrs. Cameron?—Cameron?' repeated the woman slowly, knitting her brows. 'No, I don't know any such name. Lizzie,' she called to a bright little lass in the parlour behind, 'do you mind any one o' the name o' Cameron about here?'

'No, mother,' said the child; 'there's no one at school called Cameron. Is it the new curate asking for them?'

'No, dear; a stranger here wants to know if there's a Mrs. Cameron living about here. No, sir,' she went on, turning slowly back to Martin; 'I'm sorry I can't tell you, and I knows a'most everybody, too. Was she a widow, sir?'

'No,' replied Martin, hesitating and flushing a little. 'No; her husband—had left her,—and there were two children.'

'Ah, poor thing!' returned the woman. 'I think she must have left, sir; but you might ask over at 'The Plough;' Joe Easton, the landlord, might tell you.'

Martin recognised the name, and, thanking the good woman, took his leave. Yes, Joe Easton could tell him, and he need scarcely fear being known now. He first turned, however, up the winding road leading to the pretty cottage once his own dear home. Yes, there it stood. What a rush of tender memories filled his heart, as he paused and gazed at it through the mist of gathering tears! The slow-growing jasmine had quite encircled the porch now. The virginia creeper had even scaled the little chimney, and was ablaze with a wealth of fiery leaves. Here and there in the garden he marked a familiar tree or bush, and from within there floated the ring of merry, childish laughter. Once Martin caught a glimpse of the young mother, as she picked up a tiny child toddling out from the porch into the chill evening air, and then she closed the door, leaving the sad stranger standing, unnoticed, near the gate. Martin sighed, turned away, and quickened his steps back towards the quiet little village inn, where he sought rest for the night. Alas! here he met again with disappointment in his quest. The Joe Easton he had known was gone, and this namesake, a nephew, could give no answer to his inquiry. Baffled and heart-sick, Martin lay down to rest.

The next morning he was awake with the early dawn, and, rising at once, resolved to take a quiet walk through the old haunts, before any busy life was astir, and then, after breakfasting, to seek out the vicar, and ask his help and sympathy in his difficulty. Every leaf and grass-blade was yet heavy with autumn dew, as Martin stepped out into the village street, and turned down a little by-path, leading through some pretty undulating meadows and common, where he and Nellie had often strolled in summer evenings with their little ones. Very calm and sweet and fresh was the morning air. Scarcely a sound broke the stillness but the tinkle of a distant sheep-bell, or the twitter of awakening birds.

> 'Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
> And on these dews that drench the furze,
> And all the silvery gossamers
> That twinkle into green and gold.'

Much, very much, passed through Martin's mind during that solitary morning's walk. Of the past everything around was vocal; for the present, it is true, chilling disappointment had met his sanguine hopes; but, for the future, he clung as tenaciously as before to the resolve never to give up the search he had thus begun. Light would dawn at last. This time of obscurity, darkness, and perplexity was but the natural outcome of his own wayward folly. On his way back by a circuit into the village, he passed into the little

churchyard, and stood beneath the shadow of the sombre yew tree, skirting the path.

> 'Old yew, which graspest at the stones
> Which name the underlying dead,'

and in whose shade the clock

> 'Beats out the little lives of men.'

The hour was yet early, and Martin lingered, reading the many well-remembered names on the tombstones standing so thickly about him. 'Praed;' yes, that was familiar enough, it was his Nellie's maiden name, and her mother and two sisters lay here, he knew. But there is another inscription beneath their names to-day. With steady, fascinated gaze, Martin read those few short lines straight through, before their real meaning took hold of either brain or heart.

HERE IS LAID TO REST

ELLEN MAY,

WIFE OF MARTIN CAMERON.

Died July 4th, 1862. Aged 30 years.

> 'Until the day break, and the shadows flee away.'

For a moment he gazed, tearless—stunned—bewildered,—then he covered his face and groaned aloud.

'My Nellie! Oh, is this the end?' he moaned, as the anguish of his loss dawned upon him, much as the keen, sharp pain of a sudden blow follows, after a momentary interval, the first heavy shock. 'O God! I have sinned indeed, but is this the fruit?'

In his first bitter grief, Martin felt as if his search had been sadly, hopelessly ended; and it was not until the deep, deliberate strokes of the clock aroused the sorrowing man, that he noticed that the space below the dear, familiar name on the stone was vacant, pointing to the probability that his children were yet living, or even his father also. Martin did not go to the vicarage in the afternoon. The shock had so unnerved him that he felt he could not repeat the sad tale to a stranger just then. But he could at least see that the spot where his Nellie was laid to rest was duly cared for; so he sought out some one to level and plant the grave with evergreens, and gave orders for the cleaning and restoring of the headstone. Alas! there was no other ministry of love left within his reach now. But the next day he saw the clergyman, who received him very kindly, and, though he could give him no news about his children, wrote at once to the family of the former rector, to make inquiries. He learned that the little ones had gone with their grandfather to London, shortly after their mother's death, but of their address nothing was known. And with this Martin had to be content.

He left Dipford a few days after, and though for the next three months he carried on a diligent search for his children in the wide city, it was hardly surprising that, as December drew to its close, he had met with no trace of the missing ones. Still he would not give up. Hope was not dead, in spite of all discouragement, and the lonely father would not despair.

It was Christmas Eve, and Martin Cameron was passing along the very street from which Lamb Court opened. He had often been in the neighbourhood before, but, as he lingered a moment by Meg Scratton's little shop, it struck him that he had never explored this court, and he turned down its dreary, uninviting entrance. It looked about as cheerful as on that bitter spring evening when we first made its acquaintance, only now a raw fog prevailed, and no breath of wind was stirring. At first Martin saw no one of whom to make inquiry, but, as he turned back, he met Nell's husband Jerry, toiling wearily along the broken pavement, encumbered, as usual, with the awkward burden of his Punch and Judy show, and followed by Toby.

Rightly guessing that the man lived in the street, Martin stopped him, putting the inquiry now grown so familiar to his lips.

'Cameron?' said Jerry thoughtfully, setting down his show for a moment, and taking a short black pipe


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from his mouth. 'No, sir; there ain't none o' that name here. The only ones as I don't know the name on are a blind man and a little gell. Sorry, sir, I can't tell you.'

Of course Martin knew nothing of his father's blindness, and never for a moment suspected the identity. Jerry looked so weary, and, moreover, spoke so civilly, that, as Martin thanked him, he put a few coppers into his hand. They were received with peculiar satisfaction, and left a most favourable impression of the interview on Jerry's mind.

But the giver turned away more sick at heart than he had felt since coming to London. What hope, after all, was there that, in this mighty city, he could ever search out those whom he loved? As Martin left the court, he looked in at Meg Scratton's, but gained nothing from Tebby, who had never heard the name of Cameron, and only responded to Martin's inquiry with a vacant stare.

He walked wearily back to his lonely lodging, and, as he re-entered it in the early twilight, his landlady noticed with pity the depressed air of the strange, solitary inmate of her front room, about whom she had felt a somewhat curious interest. But she did not like to intrude her sympathy, and Martin shut himself in alone.

Christmas Eve! That night of all the year when dear ones gather round the home hearth in happy

circles, when old friendships are knitted up again, and old discords forgotten. Must he spend it alone, with only the bitter remembrance of the past and the sad reaping of a wilful sowing? Yes; but it was not *all* pain. Even in this hour of darkness Martin could look up. The sunshine was not flooding his path as yet, but the night was not starless. Once more he frankly and fully confessed his guilt to his Lord, and looked his whole conduct thoroughly in the face. After such a scrutiny he could but own that his punishment was the natural consequence of his sin. Fools we are as well as sinners when we do wrong. The Evil One leads us by sin into sorrow and despair, and then forsakes us. It is the fool that says in his heart (or in his life), 'There is no God.'

And then, from the depths of a humbled, contrite heart, Martin earnestly prayed to be guided to his little ones; and after that he felt calmer and happier, and lay down to rest, content to leave the issue in kind and wise hands.

Meanwhile, Jerry, while he had his tea, had been telling old Granny and Nell of his meeting with the stranger. Nell would not have paid much heed to the tale, but the name of Cameron sounded familiar to Granny's ears. 'Surely, surely,' thought she, 'that is little Chrissie's name!' Jerry turned to the fire as he finished his meal, and filled his pipe. As he did so, he dived in his pocket for a bit of paper to light it,

and, together with some bits of string and another broken pipe, he drew out a crumpled envelope, which he remembered to have picked up as the stranger turned away.

'Here, Nell,' he said, 'here's some readin' on this;' and he passed it to his wife to make out by the light of the candle.

'Cameron, I do declare!' cried Nell. 'Look, mother!—Martin Cameron!'

But the envelope bore no address; and, though they felt sure that its owner was indeed Chrissie's father, Granny doubted whether the news might not give as much pain as pleasure to his little daughter. How it would grieve her to know that her father had been so near, yet had passed away again unknown! But when the little girl came in to see them on Christmas Day, and Granny told her, the old woman found that her fears were groundless. Chrissie was delighted with the happy news that her father was still living, and so near them, and her eyes sparkled with a joy that Granny had never seen in them before, as she talked with sanguine hope of their meeting. Only one thought clouded the prospect. Nat was gone!

And to old Donald the news came as life from the dead. A look of expectant happiness would sometimes steal over the blind man's face as he sat in the scanty sunshine, now that he was able to leave his bed. 'God has given me,' he would say, 'the light and gladness

of forgiveness and of His presence in my heart, and now He's sent news of my boy! Martin lives! He will come back to me some day! I shall not die, Chrissie, till his voice has sounded in my ears, and you have a father again!'



CHAPTER XII.

THE CLOUDS LIFTING.

'Just as I am! without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!'



POOR Meg made no progress toward recovery. Indeed, a few days after Chrissie saw her, she became dangerously ill; every breath she drew gave her severe pain, and she sank into a state of great exhaustion. In spite, therefore, of all scruples and reluctance, the parish doctor was called in; but, under such conditions, what chance had the healing art? The good man surveyed the deplorable state of his patient's surroundings with dismay, and gave the casement window a severe shaking, to see if it were possible to admit some fresh air; but it stuck fast, and the doctor made little

remark, perhaps having learned, by long experience, how unheeded any advice would be; so, after a brief examination of the suffering woman, he prescribed a suitable course of diet and treatment (which stood little chance of being carried out), and took his leave. Sorely the poor woman needed the loving ministry of some Christian hand, and a supply of light, nourishing food even more than medicine; but no 'King's servant' was there to claim the lowly service or its future lofty reward from the King's lips,—'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

So poor Meg grew worse day by day,—thinner and weaker, and evidently nearing her end. She began to feel that herself, and shrank terrified from the unknown future. She put aside the thought as long as possible, and all the prospect before her was shrouded in thick, impenetrable darkness.

Meg often thought of her little friend, but the news of Nat's death had reached her immediately, and lost nothing in the telling, so she had not wondered that Chrissie failed to pay her another visit. She would often try to recall the words the child had sung, but failed to do so distinctly. She knew they had spoken of 'light,' and was she not in thick darkness! Must she go out into the great unknown without one ray of light? To be sure, no future life, Meg thought, could surely be more hopeless and dark than her present one;

but the poor woman knew, as all sinners know, that *some* punishment awaits sin. That such was her just award she could stand in no doubt, and very troubled and dismayed she felt at the thought.

Meg had heard the Saviour's name in bygone days, and at the Sunday school had been brought near to His feet. But a life of dark, sinful wandering had almost blotted out the memory of those happy childish days; and, as she strove to recall some of the hymns and teaching gathered there, no words would come back to her mind but those which had always terrified her as a child, and now were full of a most awful significance:—

'Almighty God, Thy piercing eye
Strikes through the shades of night,
And our most secret actions lie
All open to Thy sight.'

Meg recoiled from them. Clearly there was no hope for her! Her sin could never be covered up or overlooked. *She* could remember a great deal too much of it, but how much more did a holy God see and record! Her heart sank. 'No light can ever shine again for me,' she sighed; 'but yet I should like to see my little Chris, and hear those words once more!'

And in this sad state of hopeless despair Chrissie found her poor sick friend on her next visit. Had the child known how fast Meg was sinking and dying, she would, perhaps, in spite of her own sorrow, have come

again sooner. She was astonished and shocked at the great change in Meg, as the sick woman turned to greet her.

'Little Chris come at last!' she said, with a look of pleasure. 'No, my dear, I didn't expect you before,' she went on; 'indeed, I hardly hoped as you'd come at all, before I was dead.'

'Oh, Meg, Meg!' said the child, crouching down on the floor beside her, and taking her hands lovingly; '*you're* not going to leave me too!' and the tears sprang to her eyes.

Meg looked astonished. She had no idea how much the child loved her, and scarcely knew how to reply.

'Leave you,' she said slowly. 'Yes, little Chris, I'm going away. Where, I can't tell. Very soon, indeed. But why should you heed that?'

'Oh, Meg, but I love you,' went on Chrissie warmly. 'I love you dearly. You've been very good to me—and Nat,' she added softly, her voice trembling, 'and I can't spare you, Meg!'

Meg looked more bewildered than before.

'Love me!' she said in an incredulous tone; 'can't spare *me!* I'm sure nobody else loves or wants me. What a strange little girl you are, Chris!'

'Am I?' said the child innocently. 'But, Meg, is it really true?' she added very seriously,—'true that you are going to die?—going to see dear little Nat?'

And then Meg told her how much worse she was,

and how all her strength was gone, and that the doctor shook his head and looked very grave now when he came.

'And that isn't the worst,' added poor Meg. 'I'm going out into the darkness, and there's no hope,—no, not one bit of hope for me; *that* I can see plainly now. I used to think that somehow I'd get to heaven. I hadn't been worse than other people, and God wasn't so very strict, but I could creep into some little corner out of the way. But that is over, Chris. I see now what a sinner I've been; and *He* sees it all. Oh, I dread to meet Him, and to die alone in this darkness!'

She stopped, with a weary, despairing sigh; and Chrissie's face clouded with pain as she watched her. She bent over her and whispered:

'But, Meg, dear Meg, Jesus died on purpose to take all your darkness and fear away. Won't you take your sin to Him and ask Him to forgive it all? Dear Nat didn't fear a bit when he went. I never saw him look so glad before.'

'Ah, Chris,' sighed Meg, 'your darling little brother was good and innocent! 'Twas very different for him. I'm a dark, sinful woman. No, dear, heaven isn't a place for the likes o' me, even if the angels 'ud let me in.'

Chrissie was baffled for a moment; but she soon perceived the sick woman's mistake, and said:

'But, Meg, it wasn't because Nat was good, you know, but because Jesus died for him, that he went to heaven; and, Meg, He bore *your* sins too, and He loves you, and wants to forgive you. Granny taught me this verse since I was here: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."'

'Jesus died for *me!* bore my sins! loves me! Does it mean that?' said Meg slowly, and as if in great perplexity. '"Heavy-laden!" Oh, I'm sure that's me!' she went on. '"Rest—rest!" that's too good to be true. I couldn't rest unless I was forgiven; and I may be, you say.' Meg closed her eyes, and lay still in deep thought.

Little Chrissie put up an earnest, silent prayer for her friend. The child lived very near to the Lord whom she loved, and carried everything now straight to Him. Then she began to sing. When she ceased Meg spoke again.

'Did you say you loved me?' she asked softly.

Chrissie bent down and kissed the sunken, pallid face. 'Yes, dear Meg, I do love you,' she replied; 'but why do you ask?'

The little girl did not catch the connection of thought in the sick woman's mind.

But Meg was silent, only her closed eyes overflowed with tears, and Chrissie wondered, for she had never seen tears there before; and, strangely enough, as the

tears flowed, the look of despair and pain lightened, and almost passed away.

'You love me,' said Meg quietly, opening her eyes and gazing stedfastly at her little friend. 'You love me; then I think I can believe God loves me. He knows I'm awful wicked, but if He's given His Son to die, I'll ask Him to forgive me. Maybe He will, after all,—maybe He will. He says "Come," so I think I'll try.'

And the heavy-laden Meg came,—came with her sin, and despair, and darkness, and found the promised 'light' and 'rest;' found that, as little Chrissie had loved her, so, only much more, did the Heavenly Father love His wandering child.

Only once again did she see Chrissie, and then just when her feet were upon the very threshold of her Father's house.

'I'm not afraid now,' she whispered. 'No darkness;—the Sun—shines brightly!—light!—rest!'

And Chrissie tearfully said farewell, and, very soon after she left, poor Meg exchanged the dismal, dark attic, where she had lain suffering and fearing so long, for 'the glory bright which dwelleth in Immanuel's land.'

Chrissie keenly felt the death of her friend, but she had no sense of loneliness now, for the little girl seldom passed a day without seeing her kind old neighbour, whom she had learned to love so dearly. And from her large-print Testament Granny was teaching her to read,

and Chrissie improved rapidly, and soon was able to make out a little of her treasured book. Mr. Grey had often given her books and pictures since this first one, and some were much easier to read, but none had the charm of the dear little picture which Nat and she had so often pondered over together. Perhaps none would ever be to Chrissie quite what that one was.

The short, dark days of mid-winter were over, the New Year was advancing, and the earliest signs of spring just appearing. It was late in the afternoon of a mild February day, the early twilight was closing in gloomily, and a drizzling rain beginning to fall. Mr. Grey was wearied with an unusually heavy day's work, and, leaving a close back street with a sigh of relief, was just about to turn into the broad thoroughfare toward his own home, when he remembered a promise to visit a sick man at some little distance, and, in spite of the tempting vision of his cosy tea-table and loving home circle, he started to fulfil his promise at once. He did not, however, return to the neighbourhood which he had just left, but, after about a mile's walk, turned into a by-street of tolerably clean and respectable appearance. Here the missionary soon found the invalid he sought, and, after his visit, would at once have turned homeward, had not the landlady detained him to ask his sympathy in another direction. She was a kind, motherly woman, and felt some interest in the condition of her various lodgers. Clearly she regarded

them as fellow-creatures, and her interest was a kindly one, not a mere impertinent curiosity.

'Excuse me, sir,' she began, as she dried her brawny hands and arms on her big apron, 'but I thought as how you must be the missionary or parson when I seed you go up to poor old Miller, and if you be, you're just the one as I wants.'

'I am the city missionary,' was the reply; 'can I do anything for you, my good woman?'

The words were kind, though perhaps the tone was not quite so warm and friendly as usual. The young man was now extremely wearied, exhausted in body and mind, and choice would certainly not have led him to pay any more visits, or listen to any further tales of sorrow that evening. But he had learned something of the grace of 'patient continuance,' and was able to suppress any rising feeling of weariness or annoyance at the repeated delay.

Golden opportunities of service call us, sometimes, at such weary moments. Were not the Amalekites defeated during the steady uplifting of Moses' weary hands? and was not the heavenly teaching about the living water given from the lips of a greater than Moses to a single listener, when, wearied with His journey, He rested at Jacob's Well? So Mr. Grey listened patiently to the good woman's tale, which she gave in a few words.

'If you can spare a bit o' time,' she said, 'I wish

you would step down to my front parlour, and just say a word to my lodger there. He don't want for nothink, sir; he pays his rent as reg'lar as can be, and lives well enough, leastways I cooks good meals for him, though, to be sure, he don't eat much. He's so strange-like, I can't make him out. He's mostly away all day, but don't seem to do no work, and, although he allers speaks very civil-like to me, he don't seem happy in hisself, and ain't got no friends as ever I see'd. He's been here, now, nigh upon three months, and this last week ain't been well, nor gone out as usual.'

'I will look in and speak to him,' said Mr. Grey. 'Good-night. I shall come to see old Miller again. See that he wants for nothing;' and with that the missionary went down the staircase and tapped at the door of the little front parlour. It was opened at once by the inmate, whose face and figure brought to Mr. Grey's mind a strange impression that this was not their first meeting. Something about him was familiar, but of whom the stranger so strongly reminded him the missionary was unable to decide, for his daily duties brought him in contact with so many fresh faces. He had forgotten, too, to ask the name of the strange lodger, which placed him in a little difficulty.

'I have been visiting an invalid up-stairs,' he began, 'and your landlady tells me that you have been ill, and kept in your room. I have, therefore, ventured to look in and inquire for you.'

A very warm invitation to enter was the reply to this courteous address, and very soon Mr. Grey almost forgot his fatigue in his increasing interest in his new acquaintance. As the man spoke, the first impression he had made on Mr. Grey's mind returned with greater force, though he sought in vain in his memory for any warrant for the conviction.

Martin Cameron, for it was he, resembled his father both in voice and appearance, though the difference in age and surroundings was quite enough to prevent Mr. Grey from suspecting the link. He was not long, however, to remain in ignorance. Martin was nearly recovered from his slight illness, and had so long felt the need of a friend, that he was only too pleased and thankful to find so sympathizing a listener.

Mr. Grey inquired his name, and, with the reply, though only the surname was given, came the conviction that this man was indeed the long-lost father of his little friend in Lamb Court. But he discreetly held his peace till he could draw from Martin a little of his history. And readily enough Martin told all,—told of his happy early days, his self-confidence, his sad fall, his wandering life, his awakening, repentance, and forgiveness, and his return to England.

'And now, sir,' he added, 'if any of my dear ones still live, I will seek them out. I have been in England full five months now, and sometimes feel almost in despair. I've advertised, and made every

possible inquiry through the police, and once or twice thought I've had some clue, but it has failed. I know I fully deserve this weary suspense, but if it's God will, I pray He may end it soon.'

Martin was sitting with his face averted, gazing into the little fire, or a glance at that of his visitor just then might have startled him.

No word was spoken for a few moments, Martin rather wondering at the continued silence; but Mr. Grey felt almost as much difficulty in speaking as if he had been the bearer of evil tidings. Presently he said, very quietly, 'Martin Cameron.'

His companion turned and gazed full into his face, flushing deeply, and trembling with emotion.

'How, sir, did you guess that my name is Martin?' he asked eagerly. 'Can it be that you know anything of my little ones?'

'Yes, my dear friend,' was the reply; 'I am thankful to tell you that I do. I have been sent in this strange manner to-day with a joyful message for you. Your aged father, Donald Cameron, and your little girl Christine, are living quite near here. They are watching and hoping eagerly for you.' And then Mr. Grey told Martin how, through his meeting with Jerry, they had learned of his presence in England, and his search for them.

Martin listened with breathless interest and thankful joy.

'Thank God!' he exclaimed, when Mr. Grey's story was ended,—'thank God I have found them at last! But—my little boy,' he went on,—'you do not mention him?'

Mr. Grey did not reply readily, and Martin feared the worst as he caught the look of pain on his friend's face, but he only added quietly, 'Tell me all you know.'

'Your little lad,' rejoined Mr. Grey, 'is with his mother in heaven. Your father was heart-broken at Nat's death, but yearns for his dear son now, and you will return just in time to cheer and comfort his last days; and your little girl has love and welcomes unbounded awaiting you.'

'My child! my child!' murmured Martin, with his face bowed on his hands. Strangely mingled feelings of joy and sorrow were filling his heart, and moving him at once both to mourning and rejoicing.

It was only with great difficulty that Mr. Grey dissuaded him from starting for Lamb Court that very night, which, after his recent illness, and through the now steady downpour of rain, would have been scarcely wise. So Martin was content to wait till the morning, and listen, meanwhile, to some further news of those so dear to him.

Mr. Grey told of old Donald's blindness, of little Nat's accident and death, of Chrissie's flower-selling, and of their deep poverty.

The kindly landlady, noticing the long stay her lodger's visitor was making, sent him in a cup of tea, and the two chatted for another hour.

As Mr. Grey rose to take his leave, and gave his hand in farewell to his new friend, Martin said:

'I cannot tell you how grateful I feel, sir, for your goodness to my dear ones. My blind father's feet have been led by you into the path of light, and so his heart is now filled with a loving welcome for his wandering son. The terrible dread that I might find that heart closed against me is now taken away, and I shall claim my rightful place as "bread-winner," and end the long, sad years of poverty and hardship, the result of my sin.'

And before they parted, the glad father and the patient Christian worker knelt together for a few minutes in prayer, which was nearly all thanksgiving.

Then Mr. Grey gave Martin exact directions to enable him to find Lamb Court the next day, and at last started for home.

The evening meal was long over, and his continued absence was just awakening a little uneasiness in the home circle. But the young missionary did not grudge the weariness and delay, for had not his Divine Master honoured his willing service by sending him on the very mission He claims as specially His own; not only 'to preach good tidings,' but 'to

bind up the broken-hearted;' and 'to comfort all that mourn?'

When left alone, Martin sat down to write to Mr. Gordon, that, thus busied, he might control an almost irresistible desire to seek out Lamb Court, in spite of his friend's advice, that very night. He had sent several letters to his master during the past five months, and Mr. Gordon had more than once written to his trusted servant, of whose return to his service he still had some faint hopes. Indeed, in his last letter, he had reminded Martin of his promise, and, though not exactly dissuading him from his search, expressed his readiness to receive him back gladly, should he give it up as hopeless. Martin wrote:—

'DEAR MASTER,—I have found my father and my little girl at last. In my last letter, I think I told you that I could discover nothing at Dipford but my wife's grave, and ever since then I have been searching for my children. To-night the city missionary called to see me, and I told him my story. Strangely enough, he knew both my father and little Christine! They are living, in great poverty, not very far from here, and to-morrow I am going to seek them out. My dear little boy is dead, but, while his loss is a bitter sorrow to me, I cannot be thankful enough to have found the other dear ones. When I have made plans for a comfortable home for us all, I will write

again. Meanwhile, thanking you for all past kindness, I remain your obedient servant,

'MARTIN CAMERON.'

When Martin's landlady brought in the supper, she noticed how much brighter her lodger looked, and offered some remark, hoping he would eat his supper better than he had done lately. Martin was touched by the good woman's sympathy, and appeased her curiosity to some extent by telling a little of his history.

'Bless my heart!' said she, with one arm akimbo, and the cover of her lodger's nice little hot supper in the other hand. 'Well, now, I'm real glad, sir, I am, that you've found them at last. To think o' you're bein' a-'unting for 'em all these months. And you'll take care on 'em now, I'll be bound. Deary me! And I'll just lose the most quiet-like, reg'lar first-front lodger I've had for many a day.'

'Yes,' said Martin; 'I shall not stay very much longer; but I am not going just at once, and I shall be very pleased, Mrs. Day, to acknowledge, by a little extra rent, the many additions you have made to my comfort.'

'Bless you, sir, I ain't done nothink extra, I'm sure; but when I see'd as how you didn't eat but next to nothink, of course I made it a bit tasty for you. And here am I, talking away, and your supper a-getting

cold. You'll eat it *all* to-night, I guess; and I wish you a good night's rest, and myself the luck to see your likes agen.'

And with that the buxom dame departed, to relate to her somewhat stolid 'goodman,' over their repast of tripe and onions, the wonderful history of their 'first floor front.'

And Martin fulfilled Mrs. Day's predictions about his supper, and her good wishes for his night's rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

'AT EVENING TIME IT SHALL BE LIGHT.'

'His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.'

THE next morning dawned bright and sunny. Martin awoke betimes, and, rising a full hour earlier than usual, became quite impatient for his breakfast. Good Mrs. Day was never behind-hand, and the meal was often ready before Martin's appearance. This morning, however, he had grown weary of the daily paper before breakfast came in. Martin looked the picture of health and energy as he despatched his meal, and set out on his walk.

He was anxious to reach Lamb Court before Chrissie and her grandfather would have left their home for the

day. As he passed the little shop at the corner, and turned down the court, how vividly he recalled that sad Christmas Eve, when he had come so near to his dear ones, and yet returned, heart-sick and lonely, to his lodgings.

Though now full of joy, it was not without feelings of deep pain that he glanced round the wretched court. Though the sweet sunlight made it far less dismal than usual, it only served to show up more clearly the dirty and half-ruined condition of the tumbledown houses; and more children than ever screamed and quarrelled in the muddy road.

It was amid such scenes—amid such wickedness—that he had left his own dear children to dwell! Surely it was the tenderest mercy his Heavenly Father could show, to remove his little lad, forsaken by his earthly father, to a bright, pure home above!

Up the narrow, creaking staircase of the lodging-house went Martin Cameron. On the way he met Nell, who directed him to the right room, refraining from any further remark, though she guessed at once who the stranger must be, and forgot the errand on which she had started as she ran eagerly back to Granny with the good news.

Chrissie was just arranging her flower-basket for the day, and old Donald enjoying the first warm beams of spring sunshine on his closed eyes, as he sat in his corner by the window. It was the first time, since

the bitter winter, that their warmth had tempted him from the fireside. The door was not quite closed, and Martin caught sight of his father's figure, and gently called him by name.

The old man turned towards the voice, recognising it instantly, and tried to rise from his chair. 'My own son!' he cried; 'Martin, my boy!'

But he was weak from recent illness, and trembling with glad excitement. Martin sprang forward and caught him just as he was in danger of falling, and gently guided him to his chair; while Chrissie, who had not seen her father till he entered the room, dropped her flowers, and flung her arms about his neck in loving welcome.

'Oh, father! father!' she cried, in a transport of joy; 'we've been looking out for you every day. I knew you'd come. We'd heard about you, but how ever did you find us out?'

'My little girl,' said her father lovingly, as he took the child in his arms and stroked her sunny hair. 'My own little Christine, your friend Mr. Grey sent me here. And so you are glad to see father, are you, and have kept a welcome for him all these years?'

Chrissie had hidden her face on his shoulder, and was sobbing with pleasure and excitement. Old Donald held his son's hand fast in one of his own. Alas! at that moment he felt, more keenly than ever before, the loss of his sight. Oh, for one look at the dear face!

But he kept Martin constantly talking to him, and so, through the senses of hearing and touch, fully realized his presence.

'Father,' said Chrissie softly, looking up into his face with a slight shadow on her own,—'father, have you heard about—our Nat?'

'Yes, dear,' said Martin, kissing her fondly; 'Mr. Grey told me. The dear Lord, Chrissie, has given our darling a better home than I could provide for him. You must be son and daughter both, little one.'

Chrissie had nestled down again. She was relieved to find she need not be the bearer of such heavy tidings, and that, for her father, the first shock of grief was over. Very lovingly she thought of her little brother; but his perfect happiness was so present to her mind, that her loss scarcely cast a shadow on the present exceeding joy of welcoming her dear father.

How long they sat and chatted, and rejoiced in one another, none of them knew. The bright spring flowers drooped in Chrissie's basket, for she had stopped so abruptly in her task, that they were left without their supply of damp moss to keep them fresh for the day. There was much to tell and to hear on both sides, and it was also needful to arrange for the future.

Martin looked with shame upon the poor bare little room, and was anxious to remove his father and child at once. But it would take some time to seek out a suitable cottage in the country. A bright idea

suddenly struck him. Mrs. Day had another comfortable room to let. He would take it for Chrissie, while his father should share his own, and they would live together at Mrs. Day's till he could decide on their future home. He would be glad, too, that the rent he paid for them should go into the good woman's hands. And so it was settled that they should spend but one more night in the dreary little attic, and to-morrow Martin would fetch them to better quarters.

But, before he left, Chrissie insisted on her father going in to see old Granny. The crippled woman was only too pleased to receive her visitor, and Nell introduced 'Mr. Cameron' with a special pride, feeling that her husband Jerry had been such an important link in the strange history. Like every one else who came in contact with her, Martin was charmed with the sunny brightness of his little girl's kind old friend, and was very pleased, moreover, to have an opportunity of thanking her for her motherly kindness to Chrissie, shown just when it had been so sorely needed.

'I shall miss my dear little friend,' said Granny, as they parted,—'miss her every day; but oh, I'm glad, very glad to think the dear child has found the shelter of a father's care and love at last! I knew the Lord of light would never suffer the little feet to stray from Him into paths of darkness and sin; still, anxious thoughts would rise, sometimes, for the

safety of the lonely little traveller, and I thank God for this bright sunlight on her way. Walking in the light of life, may all her day be bright. *My* "travelling days" will soon be done now. "The night is far spent; the day is at hand."'

The face of the old woman was lighted with the happy expectancy that filled her heart. For her the night of death had no terror, for she knew it would be radiant with the near presence of her Lord. She was suffering much and growing weaker as she neared her end, but no one heard any complaint from her lips. 'I've so much to rejoice in,' she would say, 'I've no time to grumble.' And so her couch of pain was the brightest, cheeriest spot in all the dismal lodging-house.

'I feel quite guilty,' said Martin, 'in taking my little girl away from you. She comes, with her grandfather, to my lodgings to-morrow, till we can remove into the country; but I promise to bring her to see you sometimes. Neither she nor I can ever forget your kindness in a time of need.'

Granny was well pleased with this promise.

When Martin was gone, Donald and Chrissie came in to spend their last evening with Granny, and Jerry, and Nell. And Tony was invited, too, with his master; and though Toby eyed him somewhat suspiciously at first, he consented, with a little persuasion, to admit him, without any unseemly snarling, to a share of the

cheerful firelight. And the dingy room was gay and sweet with Chrissie's spring flowers, and when prettily arranged they gave it quite a gay and festive look.

And the friends had such a pleasant evening together, and before they parted they tried to sing, 'I heard the voice of Jesus say.' There was possibly rather more variety in the notes than was quite consistent with harmony. Chrissie led the tune well, it was true, but old Donald's and Granny's voices were very weak and cracked; Nell sang dreadfully out of tune, and Jerry's musical abilities did not extend beyond the nasal twang in which he daily rendered his Punch and Judy performance. But if the strains were not very sweet, the singers made 'melody in their hearts to the Lord,' and the finest choir could offer nothing more acceptable in His sight.

Chrissie's heart was very full as she lay down to rest for the last time in the dreary attic where she had seen so much sorrow, but which, after all, had a certain mysterious charm for her; for had it not been 'home'? and were not the sweetest, dearest memories of her loved Nat connected with the cheerless little room and its unlovely surroundings? Here, too, had dawned on both the children the 'Light of life' through the heavenly teaching from the lips of dear old Granny. One little pilgrim already dwelt amid 'eternal light,' and the other was reflecting heaven's own sunlight on the darkened, sinful, and sorrowful lives of those around

her. And as Chrissie lay awake, watching the twinkling stars, her heart was filled with a very thankful, peaceful joy. She thought of the little prayer Nat and she had so often repeated together, and which still had always the first place in her petitions. How fully had it been answered! Had not the Sun of Righteousness indeed shone into her heart, and dispersed the dark, cold clouds of sin? and had He not filled her life with light in giving back at last her own dear father? And then her thoughts wandered to the first friendly voice she had heard in Lamb Court,—poor, rough Meg's! What a sad lot had been hers; and yet, through the deepest shadows, she too had caught a glimmer of heavenly light in the dark valley. And thus musing Chrissie fell asleep.

Martin Cameron was delighted with his plan, when he found how warmly it was approved by Mrs. Day. The good woman was charmed to find that, instead of losing her 'first floor front,' she was to receive quite an important addition to her establishment, in the shape of two fresh lodgers for at least some weeks. The alacrity with which she set about her preparations was quite amusing, or possibly it was a little distracting to the male inmates of her domain, with their proverbial objection to any domestic disturbance or 'turning out.' Mrs. Day seemed possessed with a desire to be in at least three places at the same time, and certainly showed an interest in her lodgers' comfort

quite out of proportion to the payment she was to receive for her services. Woman-like, the spice of romance in their history interested her amazingly.

For Chrissie, a comfortable if somewhat gloomy back bedroom was to be prepared. It was small, a good deal overcrowded with old-fashioned furniture, and commanded a view of scenery by no means inspiring; but when the little girl was ushered in by the voluble Mrs. Day in the evening twilight, she thought it was the cosiest little nest she had ever seen. The neat bed was covered with a quilt of the good woman's own manufacture; and though the once bright colours therein were of so modest and retiring a nature that it was not quite clear which was blue and which was green, yet it was clean and whole. Warm, dark curtains shaded the window, and on the walls were a few Scripture pictures. In the grate a cheerful little fire was flashing out its warm, bright welcome.

'And now, my dear,' said the good woman, 'you'll jest be so comfortable here that your father won't want to move off agen for a long time. For the life of me I can't see why he can't settle hisself here, and let me take care o' you along o' my Mary Ann and Jack. But men is that contrary,' she added, by way of accounting for his extraordinary tastes; and then she kissed Chrissie on both cheeks, and looked hard into the pale, grave little face, with her hands on the child's shoulders. 'Poor little mite!' she said

compassionately, 'I'm right glad your father's found you. And so your name's Chrissie, is it? More like a fairy's name, child. To be sure, you're not much bigger or much fatter than a fairy; but we'll soon alter that.'

It was quite wonderful to see how old Donald revived and regained his strength. With his dear son's arm, he could walk quite long distances, and, blind though he was, seemed as happy and cheerful as Martin or Chrissie. It is true he felt his affliction very deeply, longing as he did to look once more on his son's face; and Martin resolved that before they left London something should be done either to relieve or cure his blindness. But the result of their visit to the hospital was not very encouraging. The surgeons refused to attempt an operation until the old man's health was more thoroughly established, and gave but slender hopes that even then it would be more than partially successful.

As the spring advanced, Martin looked out for a pleasant country cottage which he might make their home. His heart went back to his native village. If possible, he thought he should like to live within reach of his Nellie's grave and amid well-known surroundings. He went down to Dipford, therefore, to make inquiries, and to see if there was any chance of renting his old cottage again. He was so far successful in finding that suitable employment could be had in the neighbourhood; but he found the present occupants of his

former home by no means disposed to relinquish it in his favour, and the old-fashioned, secluded village did not afford anything else in the way of a cottage to let at all to Martin's taste. So he returned home in some perplexity.

And thus are we often baffled in the attempt to renew to some extent old happy experiences. Circumstances never exactly repeat themselves either in sorrow or joy. We cannot recall 'the tender grace of a day that is dead.' The joys of the past, like its tears, return no more. Others, brighter perhaps and better, may crown the future, but those far-away, hallowed scenes, which possibly, in some sense, 'win a glory from their being far,' can never be renewed. Loved faces and voices that made them hallowed are absent and silent, and we ourselves are changed, and stand in a different relation to life. So perhaps it was as well that the way did not open for Martin's return to his old home, though it was a little disappointment at the time.

'Father,' said Chrissie, as he came in to tea, 'here's a letter for you, and it has such a funny stamp on it. Mrs. Day says it has come from France.'

'From Mr. Gordon, Chrissie, no doubt,' Martin replied; 'but I did not expect to hear again so soon. No, dear,' he went on, as the child questioned him about the result of his visit to Dipford, 'I have not found a home for you yet. We cannot have our old cottage, and there is nothing else of the kind to be let.'

The child's face fell a little at these words, and while she helped to set the tea-table she did not notice how her father's face brightened as he read the letter.

'Father,' Martin said presently, 'here's a way open at last,—a capital home for us all.' And then he read the letter aloud.

Mr. Gordon was coming, quite unexpectedly, to live in England, having had a fine estate in the north left to him. He had thus been tempted to give up his roving life and settle down. 'Let me hear,' he wrote, 'that you will return to my service, and there is a comfortable lodge at the park gate to which you can bring your father and little daughter.'

Nothing could have pleased Martin better, for he had always been sorry to leave, so abruptly, such a kind and considerate master, besides which he had become sincerely attached to Mr. Gordon during his years of confidential service. The kind offer was accepted at once. Chrissie was full of childish plans about their new home, for she was much more of a child now than she had ever been during the sad days in Lamb Court, with the weary burden of toil and anxiety on her young shoulders.

'How sweet to be in the country again, Martin!' said the blind man. 'Though I cannot look on its beauty now, I shall enjoy it in many other ways. When shall we go?'

'Not for a month yet,' his son replied. 'The lodge will not be ready till then, Mr. Gordon writes, though *he* goes down to the house, "Moorside," at once.'

And so everybody was pleased, except good Mrs. Day, and she was far too kind not to listen readily to Chrissie's bright pictures of the future. And, before they went, she was consoled by the advent of new lodgers for her 'first floor front.'

'And I'll never forget my dear little Chrissie,' she said to the child the day before they left. 'A bright bit o' sunshine you've been, my dear, in this house. Seems to me the world wouldn't be half so dark and sad if the good people would only do a little more "shining."'

She was thinking of the hymn Mary Ann had brought home from Sunday school the previous Sunday, and which she had read several times.

'Jesus bids us shine
With a pure, clear light,
Like a little candle
Burning in the night.
In the world is darkness,
So we must shine,—
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.

Jesus bids us shine
First of all for Him:
Well He sees and knows it,
If our light grows dim.

He looks down from heaven
To see us shine,—
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.

Jesus bids us shine,
Then, for all around:
For many kinds of darkness
In the world are found,—
There's sin, there's want, and sorrow;
So we must shine,—
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.'

EMILY H. MILLER.

And Chrissie went with her father to take leave of old Granny. They found her much weaker, but very bright.

'Only a few more shadows, my dear,' she said, as she took the little girl's hand in her own; 'only a very few more now, and then—the everlasting light. Press on, little Chrissie, "looking unto Jesus," your Star, your Sun. Let no earthly light draw your eyes from Him. Shine on, too, catching His light and giving out its bright rays to others;' and, as the child knelt at her side, and nestled her head where it had first rested in those dark days gone by, Granny laid her feeble, withered hand once more on the shining hair, and added tenderly, 'And may the dear Lord "make His face to shine upon thee," my child, and be "gracious to thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."'

It was her last farewell. Few indeed and fleeting were the shadows remaining on Granny's path. Before another week had passed, they had all fled away, the eternal day had dawned, and the happy, trustful spirit, set free from its frail, earthly tabernacle, dwelt in the city which 'hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.'

'So fades a summer cloud away,
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er;
So gently shuts the eye of day,
So dies a wave along the shore.'

And when the happy little party were settled in their country home, it would have been difficult to say who enjoyed it the most. The long suspense and many disappointments of the past few months had been telling seriously on Martin's health and spirits, and now, in the society of his father and daughter, the fresh breezes of the open hillside were restoring and braeing him.

To Chrissie the change was like new life. The heavy burden of care removed, every childish instinct seemed to awaken and assert itself. Her pale face soon glowed with the fresh, warm tint of health and vigour, the once frail, feeble child grew strong and active, and her father took care to find for her the teaching she was so ready to receive. The little girl

was the most radiant of the three, brightening their home with her sunny, sprightly ways.

And at evening time it was light for old Donald. True, he never fully recovered his sight, but as soon as he was able to go, Martin took him up to town, and he received the most skilful treatment there was to be had; but the result was only partially successful. However, the joy the old man felt at seeing at all was so great, that there seemed no room for disappointment that the cure had not been complete. He could look once more on the faces of his son Martin and his little Chrissie, and was able to guide himself about the pretty garden without even Tony's help. 'This is more than I ever hoped for,' he would say,—'this blessed light once again. I am content to wait awhile for it to shine "unto the perfect day."'

So Tony was quite superannuated now, and grew fat and lazy. He lay basking in the warm sunshine at his master's feet, as he sat in the vine-clad porch; or he trotted out with Chrissie on her rambles, without any duties to think of or any irritating cord to check his movements.

Mr. Gordon would often leave his carriage as he drove into the grounds, and look in at the pretty lodge, always neat and bright. He was only too pleased to have his faithful servant back, and to see him so happy and satisfied in his new home. For there, indeed, the very light of heaven seemed to dwell.

By devious paths, through dark and mysterious shadows, and even after wayward wanderings, had old Donald, Martin, and Chrissie been led into light; but the leading had been Divine, the shadows had melted into sunlight, and the day dawned brightly, for the Light of the world had been their guide, and His promise is sure,—'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'



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